



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT AMERICORPS



AmeriCorps is a national service program designed to strengthen citizenship and the ethic of service by engaging thousands of Americans on a full-time or part-time basis to help communities address their toughest challenges. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) administers AmeriCorps at the federal level and works in partnership with states to develop service programs and create a community-based national service network.

In Michigan, AmeriCorps members are tackling tough problems such as illiteracy, hunger, and homelessness. These men and women, age 17 and older, dedicate a year to serving their communities and country – tutoring children, building homes, responding to disasters, and restoring national parks. In return they receive many benefits, including:

- A modest living allowance
- Health and child care benefits for those who qualify
- Valuable skills for the future, including leadership, teamwork, and project management
- An education award for college, graduate school or vocational school, or to pay off qualified student loans (upon successful completion of service)

With so many organizations and program options to choose from, we understand the process can seem a bit daunting! We hope this list of frequently asked questions will help you determine which type of program is best for you. Once you have reviewed the information on the subsequent pages, follow these simple steps:

HOW TO BECOME AN AMERICORPS MEMBER:

Step One - Ensure you are eligible.

AmeriCorps members must be at least **17 years of age**, must be a **U.S. citizen, national, or legal permanent resident alien**, and must have a **high school diploma** (or be willing to work toward one) **or its equivalent** (i.e., Certificate of Completion). If you are accepted, you will need to provide a birth certificate or other information documenting your age and citizenship. AmeriCorps members serving vulnerable populations such as youth or seniors must be able to pass local, state, and national background and sex offender registry checks.

Step Two - Find a program and make contact.

To join AmeriCorps, you must apply directly to your program of interest. AmeriCorps members serve in full-time (1700 hours), half-time (900 hours), reduced half-time (675 hours), quarter-time (450 hours), or minimum time (300 hours) capacity. The kind of slot available will vary from program to program. You can view the current Michigan's AmeriCorps programs at www.michigan.gov/mcsc or you can visit www.americorps.gov to get contact information for other AmeriCorps programs in Michigan and throughout the country.

Once you contact the program, they will be able to explain their application process and timelines. Also, some programs may have additional requirements, so be sure to ask about their individual qualifications for AmeriCorps members.

Step Three - Still need more information?

The Michigan Community Service Commission is happy to assist you if you need additional information. Please contact Megan Sargent at sargentm1@michigan.gov or at (517) 241-3494.



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| Q: What benefits do AmeriCorps and VISTA members receive while serving? | |
|---|--|
| AmeriCorps*State/National | AmeriCorps*VISTA |
| AmeriCorps members who successfully complete a term of service are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$5,350* to pay for college or graduate school or to pay back qualified student loans. <i>*The Education Award amount may change annually.</i> | VISTA members who successfully complete a term of service are eligible to receive either a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of \$5,350* (to pay for college or graduate school or to pay back qualified student loans) or an end-of-service cash stipend of \$1,500. <i>*The Education Award amount may change annually.</i> |
| The education award can be used up to seven years after completion of service. Members age 55 or older may transfer their education award to a child, grandchild, or foster child to be used within ten years after service completion. | The education award can be used up to seven years after completion of service. Members may not transfer their education award. |
| The education award is pro-rated for members who serve half-time (900 hours), reduced half-time (675 hours), quarter-time (450 hours), or minimum-time (300 hours). | VISTA members only serve full-time. |
| Most programs provide a modest living allowance. | VISTA programs provide a modest living allowance. |
| Full-time members may be eligible for health care coverage while in service. | VISTA programs provide members with health care coverage while in service. |
| Full-time members may be eligible for childcare assistance while in service. | VISTA members may be eligible for childcare assistance while in service. |
| Members may be eligible for student loan forbearance or deferment while in service. | VISTA members may be eligible for student loan forbearance or deferment while in service. |
| AmeriCorps*State and National members may have another form of employment while they are enrolled as a member, as long as it does not conflict with service hours. | VISTA members may not hold any outside employment during their year of service. |
| AmeriCorps*State and National members may attend school while they are enrolled as a member, as long as it does not conflict with service hours. | VISTA members may attend school during their term of service, as long as it does not conflict with their program hours. |
| <i>The “noncompetitive status” benefit is not available to AmeriCorps*State/National members.</i> | One year of noncompetitive status for a federal government job. |



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| AmeriCorps*State/National | AmeriCorps*VISTA | |
|---|---|---|
| The Heroes Earning Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2008 (HEART Act) contains a provision that excludes AmeriCorps*State and National program benefits from being counted as income for purposes of eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). An SSI recipient enrolled in AmeriCorps on or after September 1, 2008 will no longer risk the loss of SSI benefits or eligibility as a result of participating in AmeriCorps. | The Domestic Volunteer Service Act makes benefits received to be fully excluded from countable income. What this means is that by serving as a VISTA, benefits will not be affected. | |
| Q: Will the following benefits be affected by my participation in a national service program? | | |
| | AmeriCorps State/National | VISTA |
| SSI: Supplemental Security Income | NO | NO |
| SSDI: Social Security Disability Income | YES | NO |
| Food Stamps | NO | NO |
| Pell Grant | NO | NO |
| HUD Housing programs | NO | NO |
| Veterans benefits | NO | NO |
| Medicaid | -For those receiving SSI – NO -For those receiving SSDI – YES, contact WIPA: http://www.arcmi.org/new/wipa.contact.htm | NO |
| Medicare | YES | NO |
| Trial Work Period | Check with your Benefits Counselor if you have questions regarding the Trial Work Period; or contact your local WIPA at: http://www.arcmi.org/new/wipa.contact.htm | Check with your Benefits Counselor if you have questions regarding the Trial Work Period; or contact your local WIPA at: http://www.arcmi.org/new/wipa.contact.htm |
| Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) | YES | NO |
| Is the living stipend I receive considered income if I am receiving SSI? | NO | NO |
| Is the living stipend I receive considered income if I am receiving SSDI? | YES | NO |



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| Other FAQ's... | |
|---|---|
| AmeriCorps*State/National | AmeriCorps*VISTA |
| Q: Can I join if I'm not a U.S. Citizen | |
| You must be a U.S. citizen, national, or legal permanent resident alien of the United States. | You must be a U.S. citizen, national, or legal permanent resident alien of the United States. |
| Q: Is there an age requirement? | |
| You must be at least 17 years old and most programs do not have an upper age limit. However, some programs may have other age requirements (i.e., City Year Detroit members must be between 17 and 24 years old). | You must be at least 18 years old, but there is no upper age limit. With such a wide variety of projects, VISTA seeks individuals from all walks of life. |
| Q: How long are the program time commitments? Are they all full-time? | |
| The time commitment varies, depending upon the program. Most assignments are full-time for one year, but there are also opportunities for half-time, reduced half-time, quarter-time, or minimum-time positions. Members serving less than one year receive a partial AmeriCorps Education Award. | All VISTA positions are full-time, year-long engagements. The VISTA summer program is the only exception, with the engagement lasting between 8-12 weeks, but still being a full-time commitment. |
| Q: Is it possible to serve for more than one year in AmeriCorps? | |
| An AmeriCorps member may serve two terms of service and then a third term in a different stream of service (VISTA or NCCC). The AmeriCorps education award can only be received for two terms of service. | VISTA members may serve for up to three years. However, VISTAs can only receive two education awards. <i>*If a VISTA has received two education awards and serves a third year, the VISTA may elect to receive the cash stipend for the last year.</i> |
| Q: Can I hold another job during my term of service? | |
| AmeriCorps members may hold another job, as long as it does not conflict with their program hours. | When you serve as a VISTA you are fully committed to the program, meaning you cannot hold any outside employment. |
| Q: Can I attend school during my term of service? | |
| AmeriCorps members may attend school during their term of service, as long as it does not conflict with their program hours. | VISTA members may attend school during their term of service, as long as it does not conflict with their program hours. |