

Lesson 9

AmeriCorps



Key Terms

community service
financial grant
nonprofit group

What You Will Learn to Do

- Explore the purpose and structure of AmeriCorps

Linked Core Abilities

- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world
- Communicate using verbal, nonverbal, visual, and written techniques

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Explain the mission and goals of AmeriCorps
- Explain how AmeriCorps projects are funded
- Identify groups and organizations supported by AmeriCorps
- Identify the types of programs sponsored by AmeriCorps
- Describe the personal and community benefits of an AmeriCorps project
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Key Note Term

nonprofit group – a group or organization designed not to make or intended to make a profit

Key Note Term

community service – any form of service provided for the community or common good

Introduction

AmeriCorps is a network of national service programs that engage more than 50,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. AmeriCorps members serve through more than 2,100 **nonprofit groups**, public agencies, and faith-based organizations. They tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, teach computer skills, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, and help communities respond to disasters. In this lesson, you learn what opportunities are available to you in the AmeriCorps program.

Origins

AmeriCorps was created by the National and **Community Service** Trust Act signed into law by President William Clinton (see Figure 2.9.1) on September 21, 1993. The legislation created the Corporation for National and Community Service to administer AmeriCorps and the other national service programs.

Mission

AmeriCorps has set and defined precise missions:

- **Getting Things Done.** AmeriCorps helps communities meet their education, public safety, human or environmental needs through service. Every AmeriCorps program becomes a powerful model for communities to apply in all of their problem-solving.
- **Strengthening Communities.** AmeriCorps unites individuals from different backgrounds and institutions of all kinds in the common effort to improve our communities.

Figure 2.9.1: President Clinton signed into law the act that created AmeriCorps.

Courtesy of Joyce Naltchajan/Getty Images.



- **Encouraging Responsibility.** AmeriCorps encourages members to explore and exercise their responsibilities to their communities, their families, and themselves in their service experience and throughout their lives.
- **Expanding Opportunity.** AmeriCorps helps those who help America. AmeriCorps members receive awards to further their education or pay back their student loans as well as invaluable job experience, specialized training, and life skills.

Organization

AmeriCorps is part of the Corporation for National and Community Service, which in turn is part of USA Freedom Corps, a White House initiative to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility. President George W. Bush created USA Freedom Corps to coordinate citizen volunteer efforts both domestically and abroad. As part of that initiative, the president called on all Americans to devote the equivalent of at least two years of their lives (4,000 hours) to service and volunteerism. The USA Freedom Corps is working to help every American answer the president's call to service by coordinating various volunteer programs including Citizen Corps, Learn and Serve America, Peace Corps, National Senior Service Corps, and AmeriCorps.

Operations

Fifty thousand Americans are serving their communities 20 to 40 hours a week through AmeriCorps. Most AmeriCorps members are selected by and serve with local and national nonprofit organizations such as Habitat for Humanity (see Figure 2.9.2), the American Red Cross, City Year, Teach for America, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America, as well as with a host of smaller community organizations, both secular and faith-based.



Figure 2.9.2: Habitat for Humanity is one AmeriCorps agency.

Courtesy of Erik S. Lesser/Getty Images.

In exchange for a year of service, AmeriCorps members earn an education award of \$4,725 that can be used to pay for college or graduate school or to pay back qualified student loans. About half the members also receive a modest annual living allowance of \$9,300 and health benefits.

Programs

AmeriCorps is composed of several different programs. The following sections list and describe these. Does one interest you?

*AmeriCorps*State and National*

AmeriCorps operates in a decentralized manner that gives a significant amount of responsibility to states and local nonprofit groups. Roughly three-fourths of all AmeriCorps' **financial grant** funding goes to governor-appointed state service commissions, which award grants to nonprofit groups to respond to local needs. Most of the remainder of the grant funding is distributed by the Corporation for National and Community Service directly to multistate and national organizations through a competitive grants process. The organizations that receive grants are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and supervising AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps grantees include national groups such as the U.S. Veterans Initiative, National Council of La Raza, Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America (see Figure 2.9.3), as well as hundreds of smaller faith-based and local community organizations.

*AmeriCorps*VISTA*

For more than 35 years, AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) members have helped impoverished individuals and communities attain self sufficiency (see Figure 2.9.4). Members serve full-time for a year with nonprofit groups, public agencies, and faith-based organizations throughout the country, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create and expand businesses, increase housing opportunities, and bridge the digital divide. Approximately 6,000

Key Note Term

financial grant – a sum of money given by the government or some other organization to fund such things as education or research

Figure 2.9.3: The Boys and Girls Clubs of America are part of AmeriCorps.

Courtesy of Boys & Girls Clubs of America, © 2001.





Figure 2.9.4: VISTA volunteers help impoverished and disadvantaged Americans.

Courtesy of Anton Vengo/Superstock.

AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve in more than 1,100 local programs; nearly 15 percent of AmeriCorps*VISTA members are assigned to projects that support the work of faith-based organizations.

AmeriCorps*NCCC

AmeriCorps*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) is a 10-month, team-based, full-time residential program for men and women between the ages of 18 and 24. It combines the best practices of civilian service with the best aspects of military service, including leadership training and team building. Members serve in diverse teams of 10 to 14 individuals. Priority is given to projects in homeland security and disaster relief. Teams are based at five campuses across the country and are assigned to projects in their respective regions. Approximately 1,200 members serve in AmeriCorps*NCCC.

Initiatives

The Corporation for National and Community Service sponsors AmeriCorps initiatives to teach computer skills, tutor and mentor youth, build new homes, clean the environment, and help communities respond to disasters

National Service Bridging the Digital Divide

Our country is in the middle of a technology revolution, yet too many citizens are being left behind. Studies show that many lower-income families, minorities, and those who live in rural areas lack critical access to technology. You can help close the digital divide. As an AmeriCorps member, you can spend the next year bringing technology to people who need it (see Figure 2.9.5). You can work one-on-one with young people, introducing them to computers and the wonders of the Internet; help a local nonprofit build a Web site; connect a Native American community to the information superhighway; help adult learners; assist teachers; or organize volunteers.

Figure 2.9.5: Introduce young people to the Internet and teach them how to use computers.

Courtesy of Gideon Mendel/Corbis Images.



National Service and Literacy

The Corporation for National and Community Service, through AmeriCorps, National Senior Service Corps, and Learn and Serve America, is making national service a vehicle to mobilize and increase the numbers of tutors to support the literacy development of young children. All children must learn to read well and independently and master the fundamentals of mathematics to get on track to college and a good job. To accomplish this, the Corporation for National and Community Service supports the following types of activities:

- **AmeriCorps*State and National** has 439 programs that have literacy as a component of their service with a total of more than 13,500 full- and part-time members.
- **AmeriCorps*VISTA** has more than 332 projects with a total of 2,375 members. Members recruit volunteers and help manage local literacy programs.
- **AmeriCorps*NCCC** has worked on over 20 literacy projects around the country. Members have tutored children, planned education programs, and conducted outreach to parents.

National Service and Math

AmeriCorps offers funding and resources to improve math skills, including the following:

- **MathPARTNERS.** This is a project that developed a mentoring curriculum to accompany the America Counts mathematics initiative. The project is no longer active, but the mentoring curriculum and the mentor training materials are still available at no cost.
- **Eisenhower Regional Consortia and Clearinghouse.** This National Network works collaboratively to improve and strengthen K–12 mathematics and science education for all. It is a unique regional and national system that provides professional development, fosters collaboration, and disseminates exemplary products and resources.

National Service and Faith-Based Organizations

Across the country, faith-based organizations are on the front lines, working to improve lives in some of the hardest pressed communities in America. Giving vital help to these efforts are the volunteers supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Created by Congress in 1993, the Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for 1.5 million Americans of all ages to engage in service to address the nation's pressing unmet needs through three programs: AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and the National Senior Service Corps. Tens of thousands of these volunteers serve with faith-based organizations.

AmeriCorps gives citizens the opportunity to engage in full-time service to their community. Working through more than 1,000 national and local nonprofit and faith-based organizations, AmeriCorps members tutor and mentor at-risk children; make schools and neighborhoods safer; build homes; and do other tasks that make communities stronger. Of the 50,000 AmeriCorps positions this year, more than 6,000 are in faith-based organizations.

National Service and Homeland Security

The 9-11 attacks and the possibility of future terrorist actions have created daunting new challenges in the area of homeland security. New threats and increased demands face our nation's public safety, health and emergency preparedness officials. Meeting this demand will require action on many fronts, including tapping the nation's volunteer and national service resources. The Corporation for National and Community Service engages more than 2 million citizens in AmeriCorps, The National Senior Service Corps, and Learn and Serve America. Many of these citizens now provide services in public safety, public health and disaster relief.

Public Safety

Public safety is one of the four primary service activities for AmeriCorps and The National Senior Service Corps. Thousands of volunteers serve with and for police departments and land management agencies. They are not armed, nor can they make arrests, but they carry out vital tasks including organizing neighborhood watch groups (see Figure 2.9.6), community policing, victim assistance, fingerprinting and other administrative tasks that free officers to do frontline work. In five years, AmeriCorps has organized 46,000 safety patrols, and last year alone senior volunteers carried out 131,000 patrols that freed up 540,000 hours of police time.

Public Health

AmeriCorps members and National Senior Service Corps volunteers provide a variety of public health services including immunizing children and adults, serving as case managers, distributing health information, and providing health screenings. Last year alone, AmeriCorps members distributed health information to 500,000 people and conducted health screenings of 181,000 individuals; while National Senior Service Corps volunteers assisted in immunizing 270,000 children and adults.

Figure 2.9.6: Community neighborhood watch groups help make neighborhoods safer.

Courtesy of David Cummins
Eye Uniquitous/Corbis
Images.



Disaster Preparedness and Relief

From hurricanes and tornadoes to forest fires and floods, AmeriCorps members and National Senior Service Corps volunteers specially trained in disaster relief have responded to disasters in more than 30 states (see Figure 2.9.7). Volunteers have a long track record of working with FEMA and other relief agencies in helping run emergency shelters, assisting law enforcement, providing food and shelter, managing donations, and helping families and communities rebuild. Hundreds of national service volunteers have directly assisted victims of the 9-11 terrorist attacks by providing family services, organizing blood drives, and raising funds and counseling victim's families.

Figure 2.9.7: AmeriCorps and National Senior Service Corps volunteers performed invaluable services after the hurricanes ravaged Florida in 2004.

Courtesy of AP/Wide World
Photos.



Joining AmeriCorps

There are three different ways to receive an AmeriCorps application and apply to the program(s) of your choice:

- **Apply on-line directly at <http://www.americorps.org/>. Complete the application one time and send it electronically to up to 10 programs at a time.**
- **Download the AmeriCorps application, complete it, and send it by mail to each program (requires Acrobat Reader).**
- **Contact 1-800-942-2677 or e-mail questions @americorps.org to request an application kit.**

Conclusion

AmeriCorps strengthens communities through projects that address education, public safety, the environment, and other unmet human needs. AmeriCorps members develop and implement projects to address these needs and learn new skills in the process. In exchange for their service with AmeriCorps, members earn money for college. If your community has a need that you think could benefit from AmeriCorps support, take a look at the different programs within AmeriCorps.

This lesson concludes the Service to the Nation chapter. You have learned about the various arms of the military as well as about the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps. Each entity offers a wide variety of opportunities to you.

Lesson Review

1. List the four missions of AmeriCorps.
2. Identify the three major programs of AmeriCorps.
3. What is the purpose of AmeriCorps*State and National?
4. Describe at least one way AmeriCorps supports homeland security.