My AmeriCorps Story

AmeriCorps Impact Guide

Dear AmeriCorps Colleague:

Every day in communities across America, AmeriCorps members are making a powerful impact on the most critical issues facing our nation.

Whether improving schools, fighting poverty, rebuilding after disasters, providing health services, preserving the environment, or supporting veterans and military families, AmeriCorps members are getting things done. Since 1994, more than 700,000 AmeriCorps members have given 860 million hours of service, mobilizing tens of millions of volunteers, and improving the lives of countless citizens.

Because the work of AmeriCorps goes on quietly and without fanfare in local communities, and because AmeriCorps members serve through thousands of organizations, the value and impact of AmeriCorps is often hidden. This needs to change. Increasing public awareness of AmeriCorps will help recruit future participants, build esprit de corps, ensure sustainability, engage new partners, and build the momentum for service in America.

No one is better at telling the AmeriCorps story than AmeriCorps members, alums, and the organizations they serve. This AmeriCorps Impact Guide gives you everything you need to tell the story of AmeriCorps' impact in your community. It has tools, tips, facts, handouts, and a CD and DVD to help you spread the word.

Whether you are a member, alum, project sponsor, or supporter, we encourage you to share your AmeriCorps story. For more tools, visit AmeriCorps.gov and AmeriCorpsWeek.gov.

Thanks for spreading the word!

The AmeriCorps Team

A Message from AmeriCorps

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How to Use the AmeriCorps Impact Kit

The AmeriCorps Impact Kit includes everything you need to tell a compelling story about AmeriCorps and its positive impact in your community.

The AmeriCorps Impact Guide is at the heart of the AmeriCorps Impact Kit. This guide includes tips and tools to:

- **Plan** how you will share your AmeriCorps story and the impact of AmeriCorps on your community.
- **Use** facts and figures regarding AmeriCorps at the national level. Utilize these to demonstrate the impact of AmeriCorps on a large scale when organizing a roundtable with elected officials or when making a presentation to a community group.
- **Assess** program needs and goals, and identify an audience to assist in addressing needs and meeting goals.
- **Select** high-impact events and activities where you can share your AmeriCorps story. Find tips and ideas for using these activities to share the significant contributions AmeriCorps members are making in communities.
- **Promote** your event or activity through traditional and social media, as well as low-tech methods.

Additional Tools in the Impact Kit include:

- **Impact DVD and CD,** which includes public service announcements (PSAs), videos—many created by AmeriCorps members—an AmeriCorps PowerPoint that can be customized, and several other resources. Use these tools as part of a presentation, or ask a local TV station or sporting event to play one of the PSAs to raise awareness of AmeriCorps or promote other local events.

- **AmeriCorps fact sheet** is a great way to share quick facts about AmeriCorps at presentations or roundtables. A version of the fact sheet that can be edited is on the impact CD so you can provide local information about AmeriCorps and your AmeriCorps Week activities.

- **AmeriCorps bookmarks** can be given away at events or placed in batches at local libraries to promote AmeriCorps.

- **AmeriCorps posters** can be placed in store windows, community centers, or classrooms to promote AmeriCorps and your activities or events. Three small posters are included in your kit; small and large posters are also available for order.

- **AmeriCorps order form** includes all the materials in your kit plus AmeriCorps brochures, large posters, and stickers. Order AmeriCorps recruitment brochures to place at college career centers or AmeriCorps stickers to give to students to help recruit the next generation of AmeriCorps members.

Use the entire AmeriCorps Impact Kit throughout the year to continue to share your AmeriCorps story in different ways with new audiences.

Where Do You Fit in the National Service Family?

National service engages more than five million people annually in efforts that improve communities. It is sometimes a challenge to figure out where you fit into that picture. The graphic below is from the AmeriCorps 101 tool, which is available on the DVD that is a part of this kit. AmeriCorps 101 is designed to help AmeriCorps members understand their role within the larger AmeriCorps and national service family.

AmeriCorps members typically serve at a site, which may be one of several sites served by a local AmeriCorps grantee or sponsor organization.

More than 1.5 million direct participants serving through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America recruit and manage another 3.8 million community volmnteers each year, helping the nonprofits they serve expand their reach and impact. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) also administers the Social Innovation Fund, Volunteer Generation Fund, Nonprofit Capacity Building Program, Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, September 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance, and leads President Barack Obama's United We Serve initiative.

Corporation for NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is the federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. CNCS administers three main programs:

AmeriCorps: 83,000 members engaged in direct service and capacity building activities.

Senior Corps: 440,000 Americans 55 and older serving through the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Foster Grandparents, and Senior Companions.

Learn and Serve America: 1 million students engaged in service-learning.

AmeriCorps members may serve through one of three types of AmeriCorps programs:

AmeriCorps State and National: This is the largest part of AmeriCorps, which engages more than 74,000 members annually serving with more than 13,000 national and local nonprofits, faith-based institutions, schools and universities, public agencies, and Native American tribes. Members serve in both full-time and part-time positions and address critical community needs in education, economic opportunity, disaster services, healthy futures, environmental stewardship, and with veterans and military families.

AmeriCorps VISTA: AmeriCorps' poverty-fighting program was created in 1964 as part of the War on Poverty. The program engages 7,700 members each year in collaborations with low-income individuals and communities to fight poverty. VISTA members serve full-time for one year with more than 1,000 project sponsors and focus on capacity-building opportunities including raising funds, recruiting volunteers, and designing sustainable programs.

AmeriCorps NCCC: This is a team-based residential service program based on five campuses in Sacramento, CA; Denver, CO; Vinton, IA; Perry Point, MD; and Vicksburg, MS. Teams travel to projects in neighboring states and focus on disaster response, the environment, housing, and youth. The program engages 1,100 young people—age 18 to 24—each year, who serve full-time for 10 months.

AmeriCorps: Tackling Tough Problems and Strengthening Communities

AmeriCorps engages more than 80,000 men and women in intensive service each year through more than 14,000 nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country. AmeriCorps members help communities tackle pressing problems while mobilizing more than 2.6 million volunteers for the organizations they serve. Members gain valuable professional, educational, and life benefits, and the experience has a lasting impact on the members and the communities they serve.

The information below includes facts and figures about AmeriCorps nationally and its collective impact. Use this information along with data and stories from your local program to tell your AmeriCorps story.

Focus on Results

The bipartisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act has focused AmeriCorps' efforts in six key areas: education, economic opportunity, disaster services, healthy futures, environmental stewardship, and veterans and military families. To strengthen accountability, AmeriCorps programs are required to demonstrate their impact using standard performance measures.

AmeriCorps Fast Facts

706,000	Number of people who have served as AmeriCorps members since 1994.
860 million	Total number of hours served by AmeriCorps members since 1994.
2.5 million	Number of disadvantaged youth tutored, mentored, or served by AmeriCorps members in fiscal 2010.
2.6 million	Number of community volunteers managed or mobilized by AmeriCorps members in fiscal 2010.
$480 million	Value of cash and in-kind donations leveraged by AmeriCorps members in fiscal 2010.
14,000	Number of nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations served by AmeriCorps members.
$2 billion	Total amount of Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards earned by AmeriCorps members since 1994.
$7.2 billion	Amount of AmeriCorps funds invested in nonprofit, educational, and faith-based community groups since 1994.

AmeriCorps members make our communities safer, stronger, healthier, and improve the lives of tens of millions of our most vulnerable citizens. AmeriCorps service isn't just nice, it's necessary, and its impacts are proven and measurable. Here are some examples of the work AmeriCorps members are doing.

- **Education:** AmeriCorps places thousands of teachers, tutors, and mentors into low-performing schools, helping students succeed in school and gain skills necessary to get 21st century jobs.

- **Economic opportunity:** VISTA, AmeriCorps' poverty-fighting program, engages more than 7,000 members each year in fighting poverty by creating businesses, expanding access to technology, recruiting volunteers to teach literacy, and strengthening antipoverty groups.

- **Disaster services:** From tornadoes and hurricanes to fires and floods, AmeriCorps members have responded to hundreds of natural disasters. In response to Hurricane Katrina, more than 17,000 AmeriCorps members have provided 8.5 million hours of service and managed more than 611,000 volunteers.

- **Healthy futures:** AmeriCorps members save lives through HIV/AIDS education and outreach, drug and alcohol prevention training, and connecting poor families to health clinics and services.

- **Environmental stewardship:** Members build trails, restore parks, protect watersheds, run recycling programs, and promote energy efficiency, weatherization, and clean energy.

- **Veterans and military families:** AmeriCorps supports the military community by engaging veterans in service, helping veterans readjust to civilian life, and providing support to military families.

Strengthening Nonprofits and the Volunteer Sector

Strengthening nonprofits: AmeriCorps members help faith-based and community groups expand services, build capacity, raise funds, develop new partnerships, and create innovative, sustainable programs.

Encouraging competition and local control: AmeriCorps is pushing funding and decision-making to the state and local level. Most sponsors are chosen by bipartisan state commissions appointed by the governor.

Advancing social innovation: AmeriCorps invests in entrepreneurial organizations that have been recognized for their innovative approaches to citizen problem-solving such as Teach for America, City Year, YouthBuild, JumpStart, Citizen Schools, and Experience Corps.

Expanding Educational Opportunity and Building Future Leaders

Expanding educational opportunity: In exchange for a year of full-time service, AmeriCorps members earn a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (equal to the maximum Pell Grant) that helps pay for college or pay back student loans. AmeriCorps members have earned more than $2 billion in these awards since 1994.

Creating future leaders: AmeriCorps members gain new and useful skills, advance their education, and become more connected to their communities. A longitudinal study has shown that AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to be civically engaged, to go into public service careers—such as teaching, public safety, social work, and military service—and to volunteer in their communities.

Leveraging a Powerful Return on the Investment

Public private partnerships: AmeriCorps leverages substantial private investment—more than $486 million in non-CNCS funds each year from businesses, foundations, and other sources. AmeriCorps has cut costs and become more efficient by supporting more members with fewer federal dollars.

Mobilizing volunteers: AmeriCorps is a powerful catalyst and force-multiplier for community volunteering. Last year AmeriCorps members recruited, trained, and supervised more than 2.6 million community volunteers for the organizations they serve.

IMPACT: Your AmeriCorps Story in Action

The AmeriCorps story is all about impact. This guide outlines many ways that you can share the story of AmeriCorps, its impact in your community, and how AmeriCorps members are addressing some of our nation's toughest challenges on issues such as:

- Education
- Disaster services
- Environmental stewardship
- Economic opportunities
- Healthy futures
- Veterans and military families

Use this guide to help you share a compelling AmeriCorps story that demonstrates the impact AmeriCorps programs and members are having in your community.

I – Identify needs and targets

What are the needs and goals of your AmeriCorps program? With whom should you engage to share your AmeriCorps story that will help to advance your program goals or address program needs?

M – Make a plan

Once you've decided who should hear the AmeriCorps story, you must decide when, where, and how to tell the story. Share your AmeriCorps story using one of the creative ideas outlined in this section.

P – Promote your work

You have something great planned. Share your plans with the community.

A – Act

Get out there and share your AmeriCorps story using one of the creative methods suggested in the Act section.

C – Consider next steps

How might you engage those who have heard the AmeriCorps story in ways that will further the goals of AmeriCorps service?

T – Tell the world

You are now accomplished at telling the AmeriCorps story; continue to share it in new ways with everyone you meet.

Identify Needs and Targets

All AmeriCorps programs are required to establish outcomes, including the creation of a strategy for achieving these outcomes that form the foundation for programs' self-assessment and CNCS's progress assessments. The assessments help a program determine the extent to which it has a positive impact on communities and people served by the projects, as well as on participants who take part in the projects.

A self-assessment will help your program identify its needs and the short-term objectives that will help to meet long-term program goals.

Areas to explore in your self-assessment include:

- **AmeriCorps members:** Is the program effectively addressing recruitment, training, development, reflection, and transition of members?
- **Service recipients:** Are services meeting their needs?
- **Program leadership:** What professional development opportunities are needed?
- **Community leaders and champions:** Are influential people in the community who can provide support aware of your program and its accomplishments?
- **Communications:** Is the program effectively communicating its needs, goals, and accomplishments to stakeholders?
- **Collaborations and partnerships:** What groups might you work with that would help further your goals and those of the potential partner?
- **Resource development:** What additional resources – *financial and in-kind* – are needed to meet project goals?

Identify Needs and Targets, continued

Once you have identified the needs of your program, it is time to identify the target audiences with whom you want to share the AmeriCorps story to help meet the needs of your program. Who are your target audiences/key stakeholders? What information can you provide to help build buy-in?

Target audiences might include:

- **Influential people** such as elected officials, potential funders, business or community leaders.
- **Potential members** such as high school or college students, baby boomers, and retirees.
- **Nonprofit partners** including groups working on similar issues or with a similar target audience.
- **The media,** including local newspapers, magazines, web sites, and public affairs programs.
- **The general public,** including your neighborhood, network, or community.

Part of identifying your audience is also identifying why this audience is potentially important to your AmeriCorps program, and why it is important that they learn about AmeriCorps and its impact on local communities.

Once you've identified your audience and why you want to share your AmeriCorps story with them, you will then need to make a plan for how, when, and where you will share your story. This guide provides some creative ways to share your AmeriCorps story with various audiences.

Make a Plan

You can do great things on the spur of the moment. But you can only make a lasting impact if you plan and prepare. Once you've identified your program's needs and audience, you must decide how, when, and where to tell your AmeriCorps story.

- **Get others engaged** in your effort from the outset. Put together a team that could be made up of AmeriCorps members and alums, program staff, board members, and community members including recipients of services.

- **Organize a meeting of the planning group** to review the many options in this guide and other creative ideas the group might have for telling your story. Make sure the method you use for telling your story is appropriate to the story and the audience. For example:

  - **Educate influential people:** If you want to educate influential people in your community, you might host a roundtable, and select 10 AmeriCorps members from various programs to sit down with business and community leaders, elected officials, or others to discuss the various issues that local AmeriCorps programs work on, how AmeriCorps is addressing the issues, and what the impact has been on the community and AmeriCorps members.

  - **Educate the community:** If you want to educate the general community about how AmeriCorps addresses environmental issues, you might host an environmental service project with an opportunity for pre- and post-discussion about the issue, what AmeriCorps is doing, what has been accomplished, and how the public can help.

- **Think about the messages that you want to get across** to your target audience and which methods of telling your story might be best for your identified audience.

Make a Plan, continued

Once a method is identified for sharing your story, identify a date/time and potential locations (if needed). Remember that you might need to be flexible on the date to accommodate certain target audiences.

Assign concrete tasks to individuals or work groups. Tasks might include:

- **Develop the message or "elevator speech"** that will be used when reaching out to target audiences to participate in your event.
- **Invite your target audience,** particularly if you are targeting influentials such as funders, elected officials, business or community leaders, or state commissioners. The timing of the event may depend somewhat on their availability.
- **Secure a location,** if needed, and prepping the location for your event.
- **Develop the program for your event** and prepping all those who will be involved.
- **Have regular planning meetings** so that those responsible for each task can update others on their progress.
- **Explore the ideas** that follow for creative ways to tell your AmeriCorps story and share the impact of AmeriCorps in your community.

Host a Roundtable for Influential People

Potential Audience:

Elected officials; community and faith-based leaders; business leaders; funders/ potential funders; media; influential bloggers

Identify Influential People

In the Identify Needs and Targets part of this guide, you were asked to identify the target audiences that can assist you in meeting the needs of your program. If you don't already have specific people in mind, brainstorm with a small group to create a list of influential people to invite to your event. Also ask if anyone in your group already has a relationship with any of the influential people on your list or their gatekeepers.

Locate Contact Information for Influential People and Their Gatekeepers

The schedules for influential people can fill up quickly, so plan your meeting well in advance. Be flexible about the date and time of your event because you may need to build it around their schedule. The following websites can assist you in finding contact information for influentials:

Elected officials: usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml

Community/faith groups: guidestar.org

Business leaders: uschamber.com/chambers/directory

Funders: fundsnetservices.com

Bloggers: technorati.com

Keep in mind that if you are interested in reaching out to members of Congress, they are usually in their districts during holidays and Congressional recesses, and often on Mondays and Fridays. You can find the congressional schedule by looking at the House or Senate websites (http://www.house.gov or http://www.senate.gov) or by calling the member's office. Schedules for governors, mayors, and state and local officials can generally be obtained by visiting their websites or calling their offices.

Host a Roundtable, continued

Schedule Influential People to Participate in Your Roundtable

- **Make sure that you are prepared before contacting** the influential people's offices. Be ready to share information about your organization, the purpose of the roundtable discussion, and a range of dates when you would like to host it.
- **Contact the appropriate office** and ask for a scheduler or appointment secretary. Explain your purpose and the organization you represent. The staff will be more open to arranging participation if they know exactly what you wish to discuss, who else has been invited, and why you think their boss or supervisor would want to attend. For example, the person may be interested in the community where AmeriCorps projects are located.
- Many offices may require that you **follow your telephone request with a written invitation** before they will consider scheduling a meeting. Please see the sample letter at **AmeriCorpsWeek.gov/assets/files/SampleRountableInvitationLetter.doc**
- Be sure to **follow up** a few days later. These offices may process multiple requests per day, and staff may not notice if your request goes unanswered.
- After the meeting has been scheduled, **forward any background materials,** including the AmeriCorps fast facts and your organization's materials, with a cover letter restating the time and purpose of the meeting.

Host a Roundtable, continued

Setting Up Roundtable Logistics

- **Identify a location** that will be comfortable for the number of people that you anticipate will participate. Many schools, colleges, and universities have great space, as do faith-based institutions, to host your roundtable.
- Be sure that the location is **accessible to people with disabilities** and provides wide aisles and ramps or elevators. Be sure you provide reasonable accommodations, such as a sign language interpreter, if needed.
- Order any **audiovisual equipment** that will be needed if the event will be videotaped, audiotaped, or photographed, as well as microphones, if necessary.
- **Map out the room setup** and provide the map to the person who will set up the room for the roundtable; be sure to include the location of audiovisual equipment.
- **Create a seating chart,** if needed, and provide to greeters.
- **Create place cards** with name and position for each participant.
- **If providing refreshments,** order them and make arrangements for their delivery.

Promote the Roundtable

- Promote the roundtable through your **website, social media outlets, press releases, and word of mouth** to build your audience. If you have limited space, establish a registration system so that it isn't overcrowded.
- **Contact the media;** send out press releases and media advisories.

Host a Roundtable, continued

Preparing for the Roundtable

- **Identify a skilled facilitator,** and provide the facilitator with the goals of the roundtable and specific topics to be discussed.
- **Identify AmeriCorps members, program staff, or others** who will participate.
- **Ensure that AmeriCorps participants are prepared** with information about their project and its impact in the community. Be clear on who will speak about what and what information you want to share.
- **Have written materials available** about your AmeriCorps program and its impact to share with participants.
- **Make follow-up phone calls** to influential people you've invited to confirm their attendance and ensure that they have the location, including address and specific room.
- **Prepare press kits** for the day of the event.

Day of the Roundtable

- **Arrive early.**
- **Make sure there are greeters** with photos of VIPs, who can take them directly to their seats. Have a packet of materials for each influential person who attends to take with them afterward.
- **Have a sign-in table** for media with press kits.
- **Have a table with additional materials** for participants.

Host a Roundtable, continued

During the Discussion

- **Think about AmeriCorps from the influential people's perspective.** Establish the connection between the work that AmeriCorps does and how it impacts their constituents or stakeholders, as well as their communities. If appropriate, highlight how their support will help advance your goals.
- **Describe how AmeriCorps service helps to advance the published goals** of the influentials.
- **Ask questions** that will help you to determine how influential people feel about your issue and what actions they may take to address it.
- **Ask for a commitment.** Will you:
  - Attend a site visit?
  - Host a service fair?
  - Incorporate service in the events you already have planned?
  - Attend and participate in AmeriCorps graduations and inductions?
  - Recognize outstanding volunteers with a President's Volunteer Service Award?
  - Participate in Days of Service?
  - Deliver an official proclamation (for elected officials only)?
- **Be prepared to answer questions.** If you do not know the answer, tell them you will get back to them by a specified date with a response and do it.

Follow-up:

Within one week, write a thank-you letter and include any additional information that was requested during the meeting. Include a framed photo from the event of the influential person with AmeriCorps members.

Honorary AmeriCorps Member for a Day

Potential Audience:

Elected officials; potential funders; business or community leaders; potential AmeriCorps members such as high school or college students, boomers, and retirees; reporters or journalists from the media

- Ask members of your potential audience to become an **"Honorary" AmeriCorps Member for a Day** – or even an hour, if that's what they can offer. For wider audiences such as students, post the opportunity in school newspapers or on community bulletin boards. For a specific audience such as reporters, make sure to reach out to the appropriate department or a specific reporter who covers your type of story. For elected officials or business leaders, contact their local office. Once participants get an inside look at your organization and the work that AmeriCorps members do, they're certain to gain a deeper appreciation of the value your program offers to the community.

- Show how your **daily activities can impact the community** in a large way. Prepare activities that take one hour to a full day that will help give a deeper appreciation for AmeriCorps by showing how members create lasting change. Target your activities to your audience to demonstrate ways that they can play a role in meeting the needs of your project.

- **Share your AmeriCorps story** with your "honorary member for a day." Showing what AmeriCorps members do is a powerful way to share your story and help your "honorary member for a day" develop an AmeriCorps story of their own.

- **Get feedback from the "member for a day."** How did they feel about the experience, what part of the experience was the most enjoyable, or have they gained a better understanding of what AmeriCorps members do?
  Be sure to keep information on AmeriCorps and your organization on hand to give out at the end of their experience.

Document the experiences of your "honorary member for a day" through photos, a video diary, Facebook posts, or tweets. Use social media as an outlet for showing what it's like to be an AmeriCorps member for those unable to join you in person.

Speak to a Community Group

Potential Audience:

Schools; colleges; youth organizations; service clubs; faith-based groups; government meetings; community organizations

Plan your presentation. Find out from your host if there are already planned events where you can speak, or if they are willing to plan a time just for you. Learn about your audience so you can tailor your presentation to your audience's age, needs, and interests. Determine how long you have to speak, allowing time for questions and answers, and stick to it. Use the Impact DVD and CD materials for developing a successful presentation. Check on any AV needs such as a projection screen for your videos or PowerPoint.

Presentation Outline:

- Practice your presentation with family, friends, or other members beforehand to get more comfortable and ask for feedback. Make sure you are meeting your target time and are comfortable using any media such as the PowerPoint. Be sure you have all your notes, handouts, etc., that you want to use. Make sure you have an alternative way to present your information in case there are any technology problems at the site.
- Promote your presentation if the public is invited. Check out the Promote Your Work section of this guide for ideas on how to do this. Make sure to coordinate with your host.
- Get to the location in plenty of time to meet your host. Check the room setup, and make sure that the equipment is working properly. Chat with the audience as they arrive.
- Play the slideshow or display the opening PowerPoint slide before beginning your presentation.
- Introduce yourself and any others AmeriCorps members or alum who are presenting with you.
- Relax, smile, and make eye contact with your audience.

- Describe what attracted you to AmeriCorps service.
- Explain what you do or did as an AmeriCorps member.
- Give an example of your typical day.
- Share unique or memorable experiences during your service.
- Share a specific way that AmeriCorps has affected your life or the impact your service has or has had on the lives of others in the community.
- Explain why you would recommend AmeriCorps to others.
- If other members or alums are presenting with you, have them talk about their experiences.
- Describe AmeriCorps using the information on the DVD and CD including the videos, PSAs, PowerPoint, or fact sheet, as well as information in this guide.
- Provide an opportunity for questions.
- Distribute the handouts (bookmarks, stickers, etc.) and tell the audience they can get more information at AmeriCorps.gov.
- Review the main points you want them to remember.
- Answer any follow-up questions.
- Thank your host and the audience for listening, and make yourself available for anyone who would like to talk after the formal presentation.
- Ask your host for feedback.
- Follow up on any promises you made during the speech, such as answers for questions that you couldn't answer on the spot. Thank them again for the chance to tell the AmeriCorps story.

Host an Open House

Potential Audience:

Schools; colleges; youth organizations; service clubs; faith-based groups; community organizations

- **Connect with other AmeriCorps programs** in your area to stage a joint open house, which can also be used as a recruitment fair. Use this opportunity to connect your AmeriCorps program to others and to the larger national service family.
- **Order free giveaway materials.** AmeriCorps has free posters, stickers, and bookmarks that can be used as giveaways at your event. Order them at NationalService.gov/pubs. These will remind participants of your program.
- **Have a sign-up sheet.** A sign-up sheet will allow you to get the contact information for participants and ask if they would like to be contacted when volunteer opportunities arise.
- **Highlight your work.** An open house can be a great way to highlight the work your organization is doing and how AmeriCorps is addressing community needs. An open house is a great opportunity to use the AmeriCorps PowerPoint presentation (on the Impact CD). Add your own slides to provide visuals of the impact that AmeriCorps is making in your community.
- **Show examples of your program's accomplishments.** Examples of your accomplishments could be those that appeal to the head or the heart. If you work with children in an after-school program, display some of their artwork and show the changes that have happened in student grades since your program began working with them. If your organization provides tax assistance, have a chart that shows the amount of money that tax assistance volunteers helped bring back into the local community.
- **Have a resource table.** Provide participants with information about the valuable services that your organization provides to the community. Utilize the editable AmeriCorps fact sheet (located on the Impact CD) to develop an attractive fact sheet about your program's accomplishments.
- **Use your event to collect needed items for your projects.** If AmeriCorps members serve with an organization that provides food services to vulnerable families, use the open house to collect nonperishable foods. If AmeriCorps members serve at a school, collect books or school supplies. This will allow participants to become a part of the AmeriCorps story and to contribute to your program's goals and impact in the community.

Organize a Community Recognition or Appreciation Event

Potential Audience:

Sponsors; funders; partners; AmeriCorps members; AmeriCorps alumni; elected officials

- There are many people in a community who play a part in the success of AmeriCorps programs. **A recognition or appreciation event** is a great way to show gratitude for their contributions. The event could focus on AmeriCorps members, alums, volunteers, project sponsors, funders, community partners, or elected officials.
- **Select an event.** The type of event you select may be based on the people you are recognizing. If you want to recognize youth volunteers, you might host a picnic or a theme park event. However, if you want to recognize a funder, you might have a more formal luncheon. You can tie your recognition event to an occasion that highlights AmeriCorps service, such as the launch of a new community garden.
- **Plan your event carefully** to ensure an enjoyable experience for everyone. Decide on the date, time, venue, and space that will allow plenty of room for all your attendees. Recruit a team of volunteers to help you work through the logistics and planning.
- **Invite potential partners.** A recognition event allows you to share how AmeriCorps stakeholders have contributed to the impact your AmeriCorps program is making in the local community. Invite potential partners so they can learn what others are doing and find out how they can help. Tell a compelling story that includes data, visuals, and vignettes of how AmeriCorps service has affected people's lives.
- **Promote** your event widely to the community and service recipients. Give your community a chance to show appreciation for the great work being accomplished. Celebrating even small contributions keeps people motivated.
- **Show your appreciation** with a certificate or award. Consider using the President's Volunteer Service Award for your volunteers. Think about small gifts that would remind them of the importance of their support, like framed photos that demonstrate program accomplishments. Invite an elected official or community leader to say a few words at the event about the impact the guests are making in the community.
- **Share impact** along with thanks at your event. Use the editable AmeriCorps fact sheet or PowerPoint to share information about AmeriCorps and its impact. Select a few AmeriCorps members or service recipients to share stories and provide personal thanks.

Team Up With Local Sports Teams or Entertainment Arenas

Potential Audience:

Schools; colleges; youth organizations; service clubs; faith-based groups; community organizations

Identify the right contact and make the case. This can often be the key to getting a yes response about having an AmeriCorps day at a sports or entertainment venue. Check with your network to see if someone has a contact and if not, contact the community liaison or the marketing or public relations office for the team or venue. Make sure you are speaking with the person who has the ability to make the decision and have a brief elevator speech prepared that makes your case. Include in your argument that a number of sports teams in major and minor league baseball have previously hosted an AmeriCorps Day at their ballparks. Look at your local sport team's or entertainment venue's schedules and see which games or events are likely to attract a large audience. Make sure you request:

- **AmeriCorps recognition at the event.** Ask the venue to recognize AmeriCorps before or during the game or event to reach a broad audience quickly. Hold an on-field recognition ceremony for AmeriCorps members before the game or event, post the AmeriCorps pledge on the scoreboard and have AmeriCorps members say it after the national anthem for the audience, or create AmeriCorps half-time activities like a service-oriented flag ceremony.
- **Showing a PSA or video prior to or during the event.** Most movie theaters show commercials prior to the start of a movie, and sports venues also have the ability to show PSAs. Ask the theater or sports arena to show an AmeriCorps PSA, video, or slide show. The AmeriCorps Impact DVD has great videos and PSAs that show the impact of AmeriCorps.
- **Share materials.** Ask if you can set up a table near one of the entryways to greet attendees and hand out brochures to anyone who is interested in learning more. Be sure to have someone staffing the information booth for the entire event.
- **Be persuasive.** Remember it's your job to convince these sports teams or entertainment venues that it's a win-win to host an AmeriCorps Day. It is positive for their organization's image as well as a benefit to the community to learn about AmeriCorps.
- **Promote the event.** Once you get agreement to have an AmeriCorps Day, promote the event to AmeriCorps members, alums, program staff, community partners, and supporters, and encourage them to attend. Let people know where they can order AmeriCorps gear, or have AmeriCorps buttons to hand out so that attendees can show their support.

Create a Short-Term Service Project

Potential Audience:

Schools; colleges; youth organizations; service clubs; faith-based groups; community organizations; influential people (funders, elected officials, community leaders)

What better way to tell the AmeriCorps story than by inviting others to serve? You can create some short-term service projects that are an extension of the work you are already doing as a way to promote awareness of AmeriCorps and its impact.

Start by identifying potential projects. A short-term service project should be connected to the long-term goals of your AmeriCorps program. For example, if your program is already engaged in tutoring activities, you should create an education project, such as a book or school supply drive. Days of Service such as MLK Day, awareness days like AmeriCorps Week, or holidays such as Veterans Day are great times to host short-term service projects that engage the community.

- **Recruit volunteers.** A short-term project provides an opportunity to recruit new volunteers for your ongoing work and may also serve to help recruit new AmeriCorps members. See the Promote Your Work section of this guide for ways to use traditional and new media and low-tech ways to reach new audiences.

- **Attract media.** To increase the reach of your message, you will want to seek media attention for your short-term project. Make sure that your project is newsworthy by tying it to current events, ensuring it addresses a critical community need, or appeals to both the heart and the head.

- **Set clear, measurable goals.** When organizing a service project, make sure that you have established goals and stick to them. If you find that your initial goals are too ambitious or too meager, revise the goals so the whole team will feel great about what you accomplish.

- **Demonstrate how AmeriCorps members are getting things done.** Make sure that volunteers and the media know that the short-term project is an example of what AmeriCorps members are doing on a daily basis all over the country. During opening or closing events or reflection times, have members share stories about their service and how this project is helping to further the goals of their AmeriCorps project.

Document Your Impact

- They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so **start snapping!** Taking a photo or creating a video that shows AmeriCorps members making an impact helps people visualize the work that you do on a daily basis. Use the AmeriCorps photo- and video-sharing website, **AmeriCorpsWeek.gov/MyAmeriCorpsStory** to document your impact and tell your AmeriCorps story.

- The photos and videos that you produce don't have to be award-winning works of art. You can **use your phone to capture a photo or video** of some spontaneous amazing AmeriCorps moments. You can also use a traditional camera or video camera if you prefer.

- Take photos and videos that **showcase AmeriCorps members in action**. Posed photos are nice, but candid photos really capture the spirit of the moment and tell a story. Videos of AmeriCorps members engaged in service provide powerful visual images that can reinforce and tell your AmeriCorps story.

- **Share your photos or videos** with your community. Use them to jazz up a presentation, or post them on your organization's website or Facebook page. Create flyers and post around your community to encourage participation in events and show the good work you are doing.

- **Post your photos on national sites.** You can share your photos on the AmeriCorps Flickr page and your videos on the AmeriCorps YouTube channel. You can also view the photos and videos posted by other AmeriCorps members for inspiration and ideas. Learn more about sharing your videos and photos about AmeriCorps at **AmeriCorpsWeek.gov/MyAmeriCorpsStory**.

- **Connect your visuals to a story.** Remember, it's all about the impact. What impact are you making in your community? Describe the difference your AmeriCorps project has made in the community on the AmeriCorps Facebook page or the AmeriCorps Twitter site. Include links to your before and after photos. How many pounds of food did you collect? How many bags of trash were picked up? What did volunteers say? What other results were achieved?

- **Be sure to obtain written consent** of those in your photos or videos prior to distribution.

Promote Your Work

You have identified your needs, audience, and the story you want to share. You have created a plan for how, when, and where to tell your story. Now, depending on the method you have chosen to use to tell your story, you will need to promote your events or activities to your audience. Following are three suggestions for promoting your events and activities:

- **Traditional Media**
- **Social Media**
- **Low-tech Ways to Spread the Word about AmeriCorps Service**

These methods can be used to both promote your events and tell your AmeriCorps story.

Use Traditional Media

One way to tell your AmeriCorps story is to get traditional media to do a story about your AmeriCorps program and its members. If you are doing an event, the media is also a great way to let potential participants know what's happening. Many radio and TV stations, including public access cable channels, have local public affairs programs during which they will share information about upcoming events of interest to the community.

If you want to approach the media, you will need to be ready with a compelling story. Below are a few things to keep in mind when trying to get the media to cover your event or program. You can get more tips on working with the media from the Corporation for National & Community Service's Guide to Working with the Media, available at NationalService.gov/pdf/Media_Guide.pdf.

- **Build media relationships.** Take the time to build personal connections with local reporters who will be responsive to stories about AmeriCorps' impact in communities.
- **Understand what constitutes newsworthy.** Pay attention to the specific characteristics or types of stories that attract coverage in your community. Then think of ways to pitch your story or event that fit these traits.

Traditional Media

- **Create a media plan that includes a mix of media outlets.** When you create your plan, include a diverse mix of media in your outreach. Think of the small, local publications (including local online news sites) as well as the big news outlets in your area.

- **Promote the AmeriCorps PSAs.** Contact your local cable channel public service directors and ask them to run the AmeriCorps PSAs. These can be found on the AmeriCorps Impact Kit DVD and are of various lengths and approaches.

- **Send op-eds and letters to the editor.** Have AmeriCorps members send letters to the editor of your local paper about their AmeriCorps experience or write op-ed pieces when the issues that your AmeriCorps program addresses are in the news.

- **Develop action-oriented events or activities.** Action-oriented events like service projects – building houses and community gardening projects – look good on camera, so they are more likely to attract media coverage. Invite popular local radio and television stations to broadcast live from these projects as a way to encourage their coverage.

- **Engage influential people or VIPs.** Media are more likely to cover a story if it includes elected officials, celebrities, or other local leaders.

- **Develop partnership roles for local media.** By creating specific roles for local media, you can involve them in a number of ways in your AmeriCorps initiative. A media partner can run public service announcements in advance of the event, provide celebrity emcees, broadcast live from your event, and run stories about your projects and their impact in the community.

- **Identify niche media.** Determine if there are publications, websites, or other electronic media that communicate directly to your target populations, and include them in your media plan. Invite a reporter to speak with an expert at your organization about the issue your program addresses or to speak with AmeriCorps members about the service they perform to address these issues.

- **Ask people where they get their news.** Find out where people in your area or in your target populations get their news or hear about things that interest them. Then use these media outlets to get your message out.

- **Send a thank-you note.** People often save handwritten notes and pictures of the event long after the routine e-mails have been deleted. So take the time to write a thank-you note, and include pictures of the day that will remind your media friends of your work in the community. They may come to you in the future if they need a story.

Use Social Media

Social media is a great way to tell your AmeriCorps story, to share the impact of AmeriCorps, and to demonstrate how AmeriCorps service is addressing critical issues affecting our nation. Social media can also be used to promote specific events or activities that have been developed to tell the AmeriCorps story. Here are three simple ways you can use social media to tell your story.

Use your Facebook profile or create a Facebook page (Facebook.com)

Facebook is the leading social networking site based on monthly unique visitors. It's a great tool to help spread awareness. Use your own profile or create your own "My AmeriCorps Story" page.

- **Post updates to your wall** sharing what your AmeriCorps program is doing and how AmeriCorps service is making a difference. Promote upcoming events and activities.
- **Add images and video** from your AmeriCorps experience with titles and descriptions.

Use Twitter for quick updates (Twitter.com)

Twitter allows 140 characters of text or less to share with others what is happening.

When telling your AmeriCorps story:

- **Post descriptive updates** about what you are doing and any accomplishments.
- **Share insights** about the projects you are working on.
- **Post links to images** illustrating the service that is taking place.
- **Provide information on upcoming events** or activities in which you want people to participate.

Social Media

Write a blog

A blog is an excellent tool to share updates about your AmeriCorps experience with your network. Create a blog and post daily, weekly, or biweekly updates. Ideally, the goal should be to write consistently. The rule of "quality not quantity" is important to remember.

- **Document your AmeriCorps service.** If you are serving away from your home town or home state, share regular updates throughout your term of service with family and friends. Even if you serve near home, your network may be interested in the many diverse experiences you are having through AmeriCorps.
- **Share the impact AmeriCorps has made in your life.** How has AmeriCorps changed your life? What have you learned? What advice do you have for others thinking about joining AmeriCorps or becoming engaged with AmeriCorps programs?
- **Write about how AmeriCorps service is making a difference** in your local community. Tell others how the work you are doing addresses the tough issues facing our nation. Invite community partners or the beneficiaries of service to be guest bloggers.
- **Reach out to influential local bloggers** who have large audiences, and ask them to write about upcoming AmeriCorps events or activities that tell the AmeriCorps story. Target bloggers who have traditionally written about service, philanthropy, or social issues.

Pull it All Together

- **Link your Facebook page, Twitter account, and blog.** Post links to your Facebook or Twitter pages on your blog; have a Twitter feed on your Facebook page; or include links to your Facebook page or blog for more in-depth information about your Tweets. Connecting your various social media tools will maximize your outreach efforts.

Low-Tech Ways to Spread the Word About AmeriCorps

- **Develop materials that will highlight AmeriCorps as well as your organization.** Use the editable AmeriCorps fact sheet found on the Impact CD. Fill in the editable space to show the impact that your AmeriCorps program has made in your community.

- **Look for many different ways to present the message.** These might include posters, flyers, brochures, or newsletters. Don't forget that in addition to your own newsletter, you can reach out to organizations with similar missions or target audiences to include AmeriCorps stories in their newsletters or publications.

- **Emphasize key themes.** Strive for clarity, message consistency, and credibility in your message.

- **Include personal stories.** Attach a note to the brochures or fact sheets with a specific AmeriCorps story about a member or recipient of service or impact of service. By adding this information instead of including it in the fact sheet or brochure, you can change stories regularly without reprinting other materials or use specific stories to target specific audiences.

- **Identify great locations.** The locations where you post flyers, hang posters, or distribute materials should be aligned with the target audiences you are trying to reach. If you are focusing on students, you can leave fact sheets at the career centers of local colleges and universities. To get a broader outreach, drop off AmeriCorps brochures at your local library or ask local business to hang a poster about AmeriCorps in their windows. Local job placement sites are another great place for AmeriCorps material; service is a great way to learn new job skills.

- **Collaborate with other community groups.** Send brochures or fact sheets to organizations with similar missions, and ask them about meeting to discuss the challenging issues that you both tackle. Give them a follow-up call a few days after the mailing to set up a time to talk further.

- **Connect AmeriCorps project sites.** The community and other AmeriCorps programs or project sites may not be aware of the many ways that AmeriCorps is working in the community. Identify other AmeriCorps sites and create a joint banner to post at the sites.

Act

By this time you have completed all of the following steps in preparation for sharing your AmeriCorps story:

- Identified your program's needs and goals
- Identified your target audience
- Assembled a planning team
- Decided on your activity or event
- Planned how, when, and where your activity or event will take place
- Promoted your activity or event

Now it is time to put all of your planning and hard work into action. Whatever activity or event you have planned, here are some final tips to make it go smoothly.

Before Your Event/Activity

- **Visit the event location.** Do a dry run if you can.
- **Prepare a kit** with all phone numbers, lists, floor plans, and other information you might need.
- If expecting a large crowd, particularly involving VIPs, **speak with local authorities** about traffic and security issues.
- **Create a diagram of the location setup,** and ensure that the people doing the setup are aware of any special requirements, such as reserved seating for VIPs and the location of refreshments. Also, ensure that the site is accessible for all of your attendees, including those who may have special needs.
- **Confirm the delivery of any food, equipment, furnishings, or other goods** that need to be delivered to the event site early. Make adjustments if necessary.
- **Create sign-in sheets** for the event so you know who attended and can follow up to thank them or provide more information. If you will be taking photographs, make sure you include a photo release checkbox and signature area on the sign-in sheet.

Act, continued

- If inviting media, **prepare media packets/press kits.**
- Assign someone to **confirm speakers/VIPs**, including time of arrival, length of address or participation, key messages/goals of the event, and what is expected of them.
- Assign someone to **greet speakers/VIPs** and make sure they have photos of the speakers so that they recognize them when they arrive.
- Decide when, where, and how to **distribute materials or giveaways** such as fact sheets, stickers, or bookmarks.
  These can be ordered at NationalService.gov/pubs.
- **Recruit extra volunteers** for the day of the event who can serve as runners to get forgotten items.
- **Have a written backup plan** on hand for things that might go wrong once the event starts including weather and technology failures.
- **Make arrangements for the event location to be cleaned up** afterward.

On Event Day

- **Show your enthusiasm for AmeriCorps** by encouraging AmeriCorps members and alums to wear their AmeriCorps gear.
- **Have greeters direct people** to the appropriate location.
- **Have multiple sign-in sheets and pens,** particularly for large audiences, to keep things moving.
- **Have a separate media sign-in table** where the press can pick up press kits.
- **Distribute AmeriCorps items** to your audience such as the AmeriCorps fact sheets, brochures, bookmarks, and stickers.

- **Display the AmeriCorps "can do" attitude** and be flexible.

- **Have fun!** Sharing your AmeriCorps story should be an enjoyable experience. Be proud of what you have accomplished and what you are hoping to accomplish in the future. This is the time to recognize AmeriCorps members' contributions to the community and nation.

After Event Day

- **Reflect upon your expectations, goals, and accomplishments** *(See Consider Next Steps).*

- **Thank the planning team members, hosts, volunteers, audience, VIPs, and anyone else** who helped you share your AmeriCorps story. Keep your team motivated by pointing out individuals who did something particularly well, or who made a great point or presentation.

Consider Next Steps

Once you have taken some action to tell your AmeriCorps story, revisit you initial self-assessment and reflect upon what you were able to accomplish.

- **Did you reach the target audiences you intended** – those who could address project needs or assist in meeting project goals?
- **Were they open to hearing your story?** Did they provide positive feedback?
- **Do you think the community has a better idea** of what AmeriCorps members do because you shared your story?
- **How did you feel** about sharing your AmeriCorps story? If you were to share your AmeriCorps story again, what would you do differently and why?
- **Did you meet the goals that you set** at the start in the planning phase?
- **What were the results** of sharing your AmeriCorps story? Have target audiences made a commitment to help with your goals?
- **What follow-up is required?**
- **What additional steps** can you take to share your story and further the impact of AmeriCorps in your community?
- **How can you help** to sustain and improve this impact?

Tell the World

You are now accomplished at telling the AmeriCorps story. Continue to share it in new ways with everyone you meet. You might inspire others to get involved with the issues you are passionate about by joining AmeriCorps, volunteering for the cause, or supporting your work in other ways.

Tell Your AmeriCorps Story

Tell your AmeriCorps story to demonstrate AmeriCorps' impact on critical issues, bring more Americans into service, and thank the community partners who make AmeriCorps possible.

Across the country, AmeriCorps members, alums, sponsors, and friends will shine the spotlight on AmeriCorps by conducting a roundtable with community influentials, staging an open house, service project, or volunteer fair, writing letters to the editor, blogging about their AmeriCorps service, or inviting local officials and leaders to serve as honorary AmeriCorps members for a day.

Go to AmeriCorpsWeek.gov to:

- Get Ideas for Activities, Events, and Projects
- Order an AmeriCorps Impact Kit
- Register Your Event or Activity
- Find Out About Our Photo and Video Submission
- Order AmeriCorps Posters, Stickers, and Bookmarks
- Work With the Media
- And More!