

Does AmeriCorps Fit Your Organization?

What is AmeriCorps? AmeriCorps, the domestic Peace Corps, gives citizens the opportunity to engage in full or part-time service to their community. Working through a grassroots network of more than 1,000 national and local nonprofit and faith-based organizations, AmeriCorps members serve communities and address local environmental, educational, public safety, homeland security, or other human needs to make communities stronger.

When was it created? President Clinton and a bipartisan majority in Congress created AmeriCorps in September 1993. It continues to receive strong bipartisan support today. Since AmeriCorps follows the model of the GI Bill - rewarding those who serve - after completing a year of service, AmeriCorps members receive an education award to help pay for college or training.

What do AmeriCorps members do? AmeriCorps members help solve problems and make communities stronger. Working with organizations such as the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and Boys and Girls Clubs, as well as many other national, state, and local nonprofit organizations, AmeriCorps members recruit and train volunteers, tutor and mentor at-risk youth, make schools and neighborhoods safer, build and rehabilitate homes, clean rivers and restore parks, help seniors live independently, provide health care in underserved rural and Native American communities, and provide emergency and long-term assistance to victims of natural disasters, among other things. AmeriCorps members serve in communities across America, in both urban and rural areas.

How many AmeriCorps members are serving in Oklahoma? During the 2004-2005 program year, over 400 individuals participating in AmeriCorps*State programs will be given the opportunity to spend a year serving in Oklahoma communities. They will earn over \$2 million in education awards in exchange for over 1,000,000 hours of service.

Where do AmeriCorps members serve? Members can serve with nonprofit organizations, state and local units of government, institutions of higher education, and Indian tribes.

Who can be an AmeriCorps member? An individual must be a U.S. citizen, national, or legal permanent resident alien of the U.S. to be an AmeriCorps member. An individual must be at least 17 years old, although some service opportunities require an individual to be at least 18. For most programs there are no upper age limits. Some programs have specific skill requests in certain areas, and others look for a bachelor's degree or a few years of related volunteer/job experience. For others, an individual's motivation and commitment may be the primary requirement.

Who can apply for AmeriCorps funds? AmeriCorps funds can be awarded to nonprofit organizations, state and local units of government, institutions of higher education, and Indian tribes in Oklahoma.

Who makes the funding decisions? In the spirit of reinventing government and partnership, two-thirds of all AmeriCorps program funds from the Corporation for National Service at the federal level flow directly to the states to a "state commission." The Oklahoma Community Service commission

(OCSC) is Oklahoma's state commission. The OCSC selects, monitors and provides training and technical assistance to AmeriCorps programs. The OCSC is non-profit organization and the Governor appoints the Commissioners.

What does an AmeriCorps grant pay for? There are three kinds of AmeriCorps grants: Operating grants, Planning Grants and Education Awards Program grants.

Operating grants pay for member living allowances and benefits, member training, staff costs, operating costs, evaluation and administration. The Corporation for National Service will pay for a certain portion of these costs, while the local agency hosting the program is responsible the remaining portion.

Planning grants are for eligible applicants that have a sound concept for an AmeriCorps program but require resources in order to plan, develop, and prepare the program for implementation. In general, planning grants range in the amount of \$25,000-\$30,000 and are subject to a minimum 33% grantee share.

An Education Awards Program grant provides up to \$400 per full-time member to help support program operations. Agencies interested in applying for Education Awards Program grants must already have the majority of their operating expenses covered by other funding sources. In addition to both kinds of grants, the Corporation for National Service makes education awards available to members who complete their terms of service.

How much do AmeriCorps members get paid? Members serving in full-time positions for 10-12 months receive \$10,197 in living allowance payments. Members also serve in part-time and summer positions. Members serving in a full-time capacity may be eligible for health care coverage and child care reimbursements. After they complete their terms of service, full-time members receive an education award of \$4,725. Other members receive a pro-rated award. The award can be used to pay for the costs of attending an institution of high education or to pay back qualified student loans. Members who already have student loans may qualify for postponement, or forbearance, of the repayment of your loans during their service, and the education award will help them pay off qualified student loans when they are finished.

How much does it cost to run an AmeriCorps program? The cost is in part determined by the amount of funding that you are able to request and receive from the Corporation for National Service. The size of an AmeriCorps operating grant is determined by the number of members that you request. The maximum grant that you can request will be what the Corporation calls the "average cost per full-time equivalent AmeriCorps member" multiplied by the number of full-time equivalent members you request. For 2004-2005, the average cost per full-time equivalent member cannot be above \$12,800. For example, if you request 10 full-time members, your maximum grant will equal $\$12,800 \times 10 = \$128,000$.

Where does the agencies' matching funds come from? An AmeriCorps program is required to match the AmeriCorps grant at about 20%. For example, a program receiving a \$256,000 grant will need to provide approximately \$57,300 in matching funds, cash and in-kind. Matching funds come from many sources. Matching funds for member living allowance costs must be cash and non-

federal. Matching funds for operating costs can be cash or in-kind, federal or non-federal. Multi-site programs typically require that each host site (the agency that hosts an AmeriCorps member) contribute a certain amount of the matching funds.

How many AmeriCorps members can an agency request? Typically, AmeriCorps programs in Oklahoma involve at least 10 full-time equivalent members.

What if I only want to involve one or a few AmeriCorps members? You have two options. You can find an agency to apply for and manage the funds (as a fiscal agent) that would then place the members at host service sites throughout a community, county, region or statewide. And/or you can contact the Corporation for National Service State Office, which manages AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and Senior Service Corps programs (e.g., Retired Senior Volunteer Program). For more information, contact Daniel Dunlap at (405) 231-5202.

What if I only want the help of a group of members for a short-term project? Again, you have two options. You can contact the AmeriCorps program closest to your location to see if all or some of their members would be available for a short-term service project. And/or you can contact the North Central Region Campus of the AmeriCorps*National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), located in Denver, CO. NCCC projects must be team-based with adequate work to support a group of 10-15 member for a period of 6 weeks (approximately 40 hours of work per week per member). Project sponsors need to provide members with food and safe housing for member during the project.

When does the AmeriCorps program/contract year begin? An AmeriCorps program's contract year typically lasts for one year and begins in September.

For how long can an agency receive AmeriCorps funds? The Oklahoma Community Service Commission (OCSC) is committed to funding AmeriCorps programs for at least three years, assuming annual demonstration of sufficient progress towards meeting program objectives and funding availability. Typically after the first and second years of funding, the program submits a continuation application. After the third year of funding, the program submits a complete application, which is the same application that is completed by programs that have never received AmeriCorps funds from OCSC.

Which agencies in Oklahoma are receiving AmeriCorps funds? Please refer to the following link: <http://www.okamericorps.com/programs.htm>

How do I apply for AmeriCorps funds?

Begin your application process by answering the following questions:

- What critical needs does your proposed program address? How?
- How will your program recruit, train and engage AmeriCorps members?
- Who are the potential community partners in collaboration with your programs?
- How will you meet the matching requirements for a federal program? (AmeriCorps programs require 33% local cash or in-kind match for program costs and a 15% cash match for member living allowances).

- How will you measure direct and demonstrable results of your program?