



AmeriCorps

Member Handbook

2024-2025

Welcome to AmeriCorps -----	Page 3
History and Overview of AmeriCorps -----	Page 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Commitment • Your Assignment • The Big Picture • AmeriCorps is an Opportunity • AmeriCorps is an Experience • AmeriCorps' Mission • Tradition of Service • National Service – How it All Connects 	
Contact Information -----	Page 8
Program Design -----	Page 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements of Member Application • Member Placement and Site Assignment • Member Service Description • STEP AmeriCorps Staff • Communication Flow • Public and Media Relations • AmeriCorps Branding (Logo and Gear) 	
Training and Service Projects -----	Page 15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophy • Member Orientation • Orientation to Service Site • Special Service Site Events • Service Projects • Corps Projects and Meetings • Mandatory Training and Service Events • Data Collection and Reports • Performance Evaluations 	
Member Time Keeping -----	Page 19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines • Living Allowance (Stipend) Schedule • Office Closings • Time Sheet Tips 	
Member Policies and Procedures -----	Page 23
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Policies • Do's and Don'ts • Non-Harassment and Civil Rights Policy • Attendance and Tardiness • Teleservice Policy • Social Media Policy • Prohibited and Allowable Activities • Fundraising/Grand Writing • Firearms/Dangerous Weapons Policy • Drug-Free Workplace Policy • Resignation • Conflict Management Procedures • Progressive Discipline Procedures • Suspension Policy • Grievance Procedures • Site Visits 	
Benefits and Benefits Policies -----	Page 42
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Benefits • Living Allowance Stipend • Travel and Reimbursement Policy • Member Health Benefits • Worker's Compensation • Student Loan Forbearance • Segal Education Award 	
Frequently Asked Questions -----	Page 49

WELCOME TO AMERICORPS!

As an AmeriCorps member, you will set an example of the caring and community spirit that America needs.

Our country has difficult problems and big challenges: too many children are falling behind their classmates; many families don't feel safe in their own neighborhoods; and others can't afford decent housing, health care or food.

During your term of service as a STEP AmeriCorps member, you won't solve these problems single-handedly, but you will play an important role in bringing communities together to help solve these and other problems. You are carrying on an American tradition of service that dates to our nation's founding more than 200 years ago. Americans have always found ways to help others and make our nation stronger-through military service, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Peace Corps, and in other ways. The 800,000-plus Americans who have served in AmeriCorps have done what other generations of Americans have done before-taken an active role as citizens to make a difference for themselves and others. What happens next is up to you.

This guide is intended to describe AmeriCorps and your role in it, but your AmeriCorps experience will be what you make of it. Because you have made a commitment to serve, you are a role model for people of all ages in your community, and across the country. Show others the importance of serving. Demonstrate what it means to be an active citizen. Uphold and pass on the ethic of service-by involving others in your service projects, telling people about your experience with AmeriCorps, and encouraging your friends to join AmeriCorps.

Best wishes for a successful and rewarding year serving your neighbors and your nation as a STEP AmeriCorps Member! You are now a part of an amazing team, and the national AmeriCorps family!

In Service,

Carrie Bruning
STEP AmeriCorps Program Manager

Melissa Gundy
STEP AmeriCorps Member Development Coordinator

AmeriCorps History and Overview

Your Commitment

As an AmeriCorps member, you are expected to adhere to the AmeriCorps pledge. The pledge represents the commitment you have taken to serve not just this year, but in the years ahead.

“I will get things done for America-
to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier.
I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.
Faced with apathy, I will take action.
Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.
Faced with adversity, I will persevere.
I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond.
I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.”

Your Assignment

As an AmeriCorps member, you may serve in a community organization, a school, park, or municipality. You may serve at several different locations, and you may even travel to help other communities in your area. One of the strengths of AmeriCorps is the range of services its members provide, helping make children healthier, schools better, streets safer, and the environment cleaner.

The Big Picture

AmeriCorps has four main goals:

Getting Things Done

AmeriCorps members help communities solve problems in the areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs (like health and housing) by serving directly and by getting other people to serve as volunteers.

Strengthening Communities

AmeriCorps members help unite individuals from all different backgrounds and organizations of all kinds in a common effort to improve communities.

Encouraging Responsibility

AmeriCorps members explore and exercise their responsibilities to their communities, their families, and themselves during their service experience and throughout their lives.

Expanding Opportunity

AmeriCorps helps those who help America. AmeriCorps members receive awards to further their education or to pay back student loans. They also gain valuable job experience, specialized training, and other skills.

AmeriCorps is an Opportunity

Joining AmeriCorps is a way to put your idealism into action. As an AmeriCorps member, you can help make the world a better place: help children learn, protect the environment, or bring needed services to a low-income community.

There are opportunities in AmeriCorps for anyone who is willing to do something special, something unique, something exciting.

AmeriCorps is an Experience

AmeriCorps is a real-life education and work experience wrapped into one. As a member, you will learn teamwork, leadership, responsibility, and other essential skills that will help you for the rest of your life. And you will gain the personal satisfaction of taking on challenges and seeing results.

STEP AmeriCorps' Mission

The STEP AmeriCorps program partners with numerous nonprofit organizations and schools in Clinton, Lycoming, and Tioga counties to provide service opportunities to meet the region's community needs. STEP AmeriCorps members will be responsible for expanding the capacity of nonprofit organizations who are focused on addressing those needs as well as enhancing the knowledge of customers as it relates to various health-related programs. In addition, members will leverage additional volunteers who will be engaged in service projects throughout the community. Members as a corps will identify and provide opportunities for diverse individuals and families to become engaged in their communities through volunteerism.

STEP AmeriCorps provides service opportunities to individuals who will integrate into the nonprofit and support their mission through increased capacity and/or increased knowledge related to health initiatives.

STEP, Inc.'s mission is to engage diverse individuals, families, and communities in the pursuit of social and economic success.

Tradition of Service

The AmeriCorps program was created in the spirit of Community Service, which has been a traditional and integral part of our American history. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt organized the Civilian Conservation Corps, which is responsible for having built many of our nation's parks and conservation areas. Following WWII, the GI Bill was created and military service to our country was awarded with educational benefits. In 1960, President John F. Kennedy sought to relieve international distress and poverty by citizen service abroad, through the creation of the Peace Corps. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson was instrumental in the creation of the VISTA program as a domestic Peace Corps to address community issues here at home.

Experimental youth and senior service programs sprang up all over the country during the 1970's and 1980's. With this movement, the private and nonprofit sectors began to play a substantial role in both advocacy for, and the development of, volunteer and citizen service.

In President George H.W. Bush's 1989 inaugural address, he invoked the vision of a "thousand points of light," and invited the nation to take action through service to their fellow citizens. In 1990, President Bush developed the "Commission on National and Community Service", to engage

U.S. citizens in community programs designed to combat illiteracy and poverty, and to address environmental issues.

Further expansion of national service took place in 1993 with the signing of the National Community Service Trust Act by President William J. Clinton. This law created a national headquarters that would administer the funds set aside to support community service programs including VISTA, The Senior Corps, Learn and Serve, and a newly created AmeriCorps.

In 2001, following the September 11 tragedies, President George W. Bush asked all Americans to give their time and talents back to their communities; at least two years or 4,000 hours over their lifetime. On July 3, 2003, President Bush signed the Strengthen AmeriCorps Program Act, which nearly doubled the number of AmeriCorps members.

In 2009, the Serve America Act was passed under President Barack H. Obama continuing the legacy of expanding national service opportunities.

In 2021, a landmark legislative package was passed called the American Rescue Plan, to include \$1 billion dollars for AmeriCorps programs to bolster community response efforts to the covid 19 pandemic, while building a new path forward.

Today, AmeriCorps engages more than 270,000 Americans in intensive service each year at more than 30,000 unique sites including nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country. Since the program's founding in 1994, more than **1 million** AmeriCorps members have contributed more than **1.4 billion hours** in service across America while tackling pressing problems and mobilizing more than 2.3 million volunteers for the organizations they serve.

NATIONAL SERVICE – HOW IT ALL CONNECTS

The [AmeriCorps Agency](#) headquarters is located in Washington D.C. and provides the funding and regulations for National Service programs.

The [AmeriCorps Grant](#) is made available to states through the State Commission Office. In Pennsylvania, AmeriCorps grants are awarded to [PennSERVE](#), which is part of the Governor's Office of Citizen Service, located in Harrisburg, and a component of the Department of Labor and Industry.

Community-based organizations, such as [Lycoming-Clinton Counties Commission for Community Action \(STEP\), Inc. \(or simply STEP, Inc. for short\)](#), apply to receive an AmeriCorps grant through a lengthy proposal process. STEP, Inc. administers the AmeriCorps grant referred to as [STEP AmeriCorps](#).

[STEP AmeriCorps](#) partners with non-profit, faith-based, governmental organizations as well as school districts to provide opportunities for AmeriCorps members to complete a term of service.

Contact Information

When members, site supervisors, or others have questions or concerns, STEP AmeriCorps staff can be reached at 570-601-9672.

STEP AmeriCorps is located in the yellow building next to STEP Head Start and behind the main STEP, Inc. building in Newberry Township.

Address: [STEP AmeriCorps](#)
[2140 Boyd Street](#)
[Williamsport, PA 17701](#)

STEP AmeriCorps' office hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00AM to 4:30PM.

Communication is important to us! STEP AmeriCorps staff will strive to communicate with you in a variety of ways such as email, phone, text and video conferencing.

Program Staff

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Program Design

Requirements of Member Application

To be considered for a STEP AmeriCorps position, applicants must meet certain general requirements.

- Be at least 17 years of age at the time of orientation.
- Be a U.S. Citizen or U.S. national or a lawful permanent resident alien of the United States (individuals who are in the United States under a student, work, or tourist visa are not eligible to become AmeriCorps members.)
- Provide documentation of possessing a minimum of a high school diploma or GED.
- Complete the STEP AmeriCorps application and submit the required documentation if selected to serve (e.g., educational transcripts, resume, birth certificate or passport, Social Security Card, etc.).
- Obtain satisfactory Act 151 (Child Abuse), Act 34 (State Criminal History) Clearances, FBI Clearance, and the National Sex Offender Registry.

Member Placement and Site Assignment

STEP AmeriCorps is a clearinghouse for member applications. Member applications are received by STEP AmeriCorps and made available to service sites for review. Applications are made available to the service site for the establishment of interviews and the final acceptance process. Service sites interview and select an individual for their position observing all applicable equal opportunity laws and regulations. Once selection has been made, STEP AmeriCorps is notified and processing for entrance into STEP AmeriCorps is initiated. STEP AmeriCorps members are selected through a competitive application process for a commitment of at least one term of service.

Members may earn the equivalent of two fulltime education awards and serve no more than a total of four terms at a STEP AmeriCorps approved service site or any other AmeriCorps national or state program. In other words; there are several scenarios for service depending on host site needs and the availability of positions with an individual AmeriCorps program. Additional terms may be possible through AmeriCorps VISTA or NCCC. Please check with the program manager for more information.

Member Service Description

A member's term of service requires a minimum of 1700 hours for a fulltime position, a minimum of 1200 for a reduced full-time position, a minimum of 900 hours for a part-time position, 450 hours for quarter time and 300 hours for minimum time. Terms of service are within a designated one-year period. The specific service responsibilities of the member(s) will vary between each service site. AmeriCorps members are not considered volunteers, workers, staff, or employees; instead, a member is simply that, a member of a national service organization.

There are general responsibilities each STEP AmeriCorps member must follow. Members will:

- [Work continually toward the development and practice of leadership.](#)
- [Develop a working relationship with the service site community.](#)
- [Participate in training activities.](#)
- [Develop personal and professional goals and track achievements.](#)
- [Work with service site supervisors and STEP AmeriCorps staff to monitor progress and challenges.](#)
- [Participate in STEP AmeriCorps required corps projects and attend all meetings.](#)
- [Complete and participate in all forms of external and internal evaluation as directed by STEP AmeriCorps.](#)
- [Commit to fulfilling the mission of STEP AmeriCorps with professionalism and integrity.](#)

STEP AmeriCorps Staff

The service site supervisors, Member Development Coordinator, and the Program Manager, are the links between the STEP AmeriCorps office, the members, the service sites, and the communities. The STEP AmeriCorps staff is responsible for monitoring and supporting the members to ensure adherence to the goals set forth by the service sites and STEP AmeriCorps. By providing resources and support, the site supervisors and the STEP AmeriCorps staff can work closely with the members who may need individual attention.

The Program Manager and Member Development Coordinator are available to answer questions about STEP AmeriCorps. The STEP AmeriCorps Staff will conduct regular service site visits and can handle issues that may arise. The STEP AmeriCorps Staff will be available to assist members and service sites by offering technical assistance and support with any STEP AmeriCorps or service site related problem.

The site supervisor's immediate contact is the STEP AmeriCorps Member Development Coordinator (Member Coordinator). In addition to the duties mentioned above, the Member Coordinator will be responsible for supporting trainings and activities.

The Chief Financial Officer in conjunction with the STEP AmeriCorps Staff serves as the state and federal liaison for the STEP AmeriCorps program and coordinates the general program's fiscal responsibilities. In addition, the Chief Operations Officer supervises the STEP AmeriCorps program manager, mediates in conflict resolution negotiations, and develops STEP AmeriCorps program policy in conjunction with the Program Manager. In addition to the duties mentioned above the Program Manager will be responsible for helping to develop local networks.

Communication Flow

In order to maintain the continuity of information flow, lines of communication have been developed. The member should start from the level closest to their position and work their way up the chain of command.

[Site supervisors](#) should identify a secondary site supervisor that could be called upon or referred to if the primary site supervisor is unavailable. A contract will be developed with the site, and kept on file with STEP AmeriCorps, to indicate authorized site supervisor signatures for all STEP AmeriCorps documentation. Members and Site Supervisors should view the [Member Development Coordinator](#) as their immediate contact with STEP AmeriCorps. If the Member Coordinator is not able to answer questions that arise, he/she will direct the questions to another STEP AmeriCorps staff.

The [Program Manager](#) can be helpful in conflict management and can mediate unresolved issues. The Member Development Coordinator will consult the Program Manager as soon as an issue arises so he/she can help.

Public and Media Relations

Members and service sites are sometimes the focus of attention and scrutiny by the media, AmeriCorps the Agency, fellow members, service sites, and the community at large. People often want to learn more about AmeriCorps; and service sites and members are logical choices of resources from whom to get information.

STEP AmeriCorps members should be prepared to describe their AmeriCorps experience quickly and simply. An "elevator speech" is a prepared summary that can be delivered in 30 seconds – the

time it would take to spark interest during a chance meeting in an elevator. Here is a straightforward structure to follow:

My name is [NAME] and I am a STEP AmeriCorps member serving with [ORGANIZATION]. For the next year, I will be doing [TYPE OF SERVICE] while working to [TANGIBLE OUTCOME] in [LOCATION].

This is the initial 15-30 second introduction, which touches all the most crucial information in two sentences.

Here are some tips for members in telling their stories of service:

- Begin with the elevator speech. *(This helps to set the tone of service.)*
- Share what led you to serve. *(Here is an opportunity to share what inspires you to serve.)*
- Share the impact of your service on the community. *(You can do this through sharing an anecdotal story and/or statistics that show the significance of the work.)*
- Share what you will do after your service year. *(This is a chance to share what skills were attained through service and how you plan to apply them in the future.)*

Members are representing STEP AmeriCorps as well as their service site, so it is important to project a positive professional attitude. General information is reviewed so the member can feel comfortable with the facts, figures, and history behind STEP AmeriCorps. Once on site, members and site supervisors may be contacted by the media to talk about the STEP AmeriCorps. Members and site supervisors should answer questions honestly and openly. Members and site supervisors are the best representatives of STEP AmeriCorps, because they are people that have the stories to tell and the experiences to relate in regard to the National Service movement and the STEP AmeriCorps. From time to time, STEP AmeriCorps will request that members and service site supervisors represent and speak about AmeriCorps at special events or functions.

AmeriCorps Branding (Logo and Gear)

The AmeriCorps logo and gear are public symbols of our commitment to service. Each time we put on the AmeriCorps symbol, we identify ourselves as representatives of AmeriCorps and STEP, Inc, and we become trustees of the relationship between our AmeriCorps organization and the community. Along with wearing the logo/gear comes the responsibility of representing STEP excellently and inspiring others. The mission of the logo/gear is:

- To establish a sense of excellence, discipline, and purpose in all STEP AmeriCorps members;
- To instill a sense of pride in the idea and value of service to others that the logo represents;
- To identify individuals as a STEP AmeriCorps member – a symbol of leadership, hope, and inspiration;
- To establish a feeling of connection between different “generations” of STEP AmeriCorps members and a sense of stewardship for the organization’s relationship with the community;
- To build a feeling of unity and spirit across STEP AmeriCorps;

-To express our full-time commitment to helping solve social problems and to contributing to building and maintaining a beloved free and just, community and nation.

STEP AmeriCorps members are required wear some form of AmeriCorps ID while in service. Each member will be provided with the following items:

1. Two T-shirts, One Hooded Sweatshirt
2. One AmeriCorps lapel pin
3. One name badge on an AmeriCorps Lanyard

Training and Service Projects

Philosophy

Training is an important component of the AmeriCorps program. STEP AmeriCorps Member Meetings and Trainings are designed to add knowledge, understanding, and provide professional development and job readiness to assist members in personal, professional, and AmeriCorps development.

As an AmeriCorps member, you are neither an employee nor a volunteer, but something unique and special. First, you are a part of a National Service organization, created to “get things done” in the communities in which we live. Second, you are part of an organization, STEP AmeriCorps, which is dedicated to community change and development. Third, you are a catalyst for change at your service site, helping to meet the needs of that particular organization in the community.

The member meetings and training opportunities are provided to assist with developing your potential in each of these areas. Member meetings are the one opportunity each month for the whole team to meet together, become acquainted, and develop a sense of belonging. Attendance is required at all monthly meetings. Absences are only permitted for serious illness or emergency. You must call or email the STEP AmeriCorps Member Development Coordinator to discuss your absence prior to the start of the meeting. Service at your site and member meetings are not competing interests. They are two components of the same program and work together in your experience of being an AmeriCorps member. A minimum of 80% of your AmeriCorps hours should be in service to your assigned site. A maximum of 20% of your hours may be toward STEP AmeriCorps trainings and special service projects.

Member Orientation

Members attend orientation each year, before beginning service at their service site. The first day of Orientation is considered the member’s first day of service. Member orientation is an important piece of the members’ term of service. Orientation helps the member feel part of a team, welcomes the member to the national organization of AmeriCorps, and orients the member to STEP AmeriCorps’ philosophy, policies, and procedures. Members will come away understanding the AmeriCorps and STEP AmeriCorps mission and goals as well as develop goals for themselves to complete during their service term.

Orientation to Service Site

The service site is responsible for providing a service site orientation for each member.

STEP AmeriCorps believes that orientation is important to help the new member feel welcome and part of a team; and to ensure a thorough understanding of the service site’s philosophy, policies, and procedures.

The member should read and understand the service site’s mission. In order to represent the service site effectively, the member should know the service site’s goals and how the mission fits with the STEP AmeriCorps mission. The member should also review the service description and expectations go over the goals, objectives, and tasks, and review personnel policies that pertain to members with his/her site supervisor.

Each member should be given a tour of the service site and introduced to all of the staff members, as well as be familiar with each of their positions within the organization.

Special Service Site Events

The service site is encouraged to provide opportunities for members to attend special events, conferences, community events, and other activities. Involving members in special events will help them better identify with the community in which they serve. If a member is participating in or helping with a special event for the service site and it conflicts with a STEP AmeriCorps projects or meetings, the Program Manager or Member Coordinator must be contacted at least two weeks prior to the event to discuss the situation and come up with possible solutions. Members are expected to participate in trainings and corps projects and are not generally excused.

Service Projects

The Corporation for National Service requires that members take part in scheduled national service projects. On these designated dates, members all over the United States will be making a difference as they perform service within their communities.

Service projects are an ideal time for team building and spreading the word about AmeriCorps and National Service. Members are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate and professional manner when participating in service projects. Signature service dates may include 9/11 Day of Remembrance, MLK Day of Service, and AmeriCorps Week. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and AmeriCorps week are mandatory service projects.

Please refer to the program year calendar for the schedule of signature projects. These project hours are counted towards meeting the 1700, 1200, 900, 450, 300-hour service requirement.

Corps Projects and Meetings

STEP AmeriCorps members are responsible for participating in community service projects that are in addition for service with their service site. These projects are required and count towards the 1700, 1200, 900, or 450-hour service requirement. All corps projects are approved by the program staff and supervised by an approved staff.

All members are required to participate in monthly meetings and trainings. If a member is unable to attend due to an emergency, you must notify the Program Manager or Member Coordinator the day of the meeting or project. When applicable, an advanced notice of absence is required. Recurring absences may result in suspension and/or termination. Stipend checks may be held and given out at monthly meetings if there are issues with attendance.

NOTE: CORPS MEETINGS AND REQUIRED SERVICE PROJECTS ARE MANDATORY. YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO LOG HOURS AT YOUR SERVICE SITE DURING MANDATORY AND REQUIRED ACTIVITIES.

STEP AmeriCorps will reimburse members for eligible travel expenses incurred while attending a STEP AmeriCorps required activity if funds are available.

Mandatory Training and Service Events		
WHO	WHAT	WHEN
All Members	AmeriCorps Orientation	First Day
All Members	Monthly Meetings	September - June
All Members	9/11 Day of Service	September (Date TBD)
Members Working with Children	On-Line Mandated Reporting	Within 30 days of start date
All Members	First Aid/CPR	Within 30 days of start date, every 2 years
All Members	On-Line AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities	Within 30 days of start date
All Members	MLK Day Service Activity	January – MLK Day
All Members	AmeriCorps Week Conference	March
All Members	Life After AmeriCorps Final Meeting	June
All Members	On-Line Your AmeriStory and What's Next	Within 30 days of exit date
All REQUIRED On-Line Training information & instructions can be found in the member portal on the STEP webpage.		

Data Collection and Reports

The corps project activity and demographic reports are statistical reports of service and the measurable results of the service, as documented by STEP AmeriCorps members. Corps member reports are vital to STEP AmeriCorps, as these statistical records provide necessary information essential to the funding of the STEP AmeriCorps program and demonstrate the impact of service. Members are required to complete and file a corps reports with STEP AmeriCorps based on the schedule provided.

Performance Evaluations

Member performance reviews will be conducted a minimum of twice during the grant year by the service site supervisor. In addition, members will evaluate their experience twice during the grant year.

Member Time Keeping

Guidelines

The OnCorps Reports system is the official record of member service hours. On Corps time sheets are due weekly on Monday by 10am.

Fulltime and reduced fulltime members are required to serve a minimum of 32 hours a week. Halftime members are required to serve a minimum of 15 hours per week. If a member is not following the minimum number of hours served, it can result in a written warning and the member must develop a plan of action to get back on track. Failure to maintain the hours requirements could result in suspension or termination from the program.

Members must submit their hours to be reviewed and approved by Site Supervisors and Program Staff. Additionally, PennnSERVE staff may periodically review member service hours using OnCorps Reports.

All timesheets must use approved service and training subcategories.

Approved Training Categories

Citizenship
Disaster Preparedness
Professional Development
Service Learning

Approved Service Categories

Capacity Building: Program Development & Support
Capacity Building: Project Planning & Management
Community Building: Outreach
Community Building: Service Projects
Environmental Stewardship
Healthy Futures/Nutrition Education & Outreach
Social Services Support/Case Management
Volunteer Generation/Training/Management
Youth Activities: After School Programs/Recreational
Youth Activities: Mentoring/Life Skills
Other Service

Additional instructions are available in the separate manual entitled OnCorps Reporting Instructions that all members have been provided. Members may not receive service hours for lunch or rest periods. Exceptions include members who may remain in service during lunch periods, such as members serving at education-related host sites who take lunch with youth/students. Members and site supervisors are responsible for timely submission, and accurate time sheets. A lunch/dinner or break must be taken if serving more than 6 hours in one day.

Living Allowance (Stipend) Schedule

August 29, 2024	February 27, 2025
September 12, 2024	March 13, 2025
September 26, 2024	March 27, 2025
October 10, 2024	April 10, 2025
October 24, 2024	April 24, 2025
November 7, 2024	May 8, 2025
November 21, 2024	May 22, 2025
December 5, 2024	June 5, 2025
December 19, 2024	June 19, 2025
January 2, 2025	July 3, 2025
January 16, 2025	July 17, 2025
January 30, 2025	July 31, 2025
February 13, 2025	August 14, 2025

STEP AmeriCorps Office Closings

These are closings of the STEP Office, during which STEP AmeriCorps staff will be unavailable. Holiday closings may vary by service site. Please check with your site supervisor to determine holiday closings at your site.

Labor Day	September 2, 2024
Veteran's Day	November 11, 2024
Thanksgiving Day	November 28, 2024
Day after Thanksgiving	November 29, 2024
Christmas Day Observance	December 25, 2024
New Year's Day	January 1, 2025
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	January 20, 2025
President's Day	February 17, 2025
Good Friday	April 18, 2025
Memorial Day	May 26, 2025
Junteenth	June 19, 2025
Independence Day	July 4, 2025

STEP AmeriCorps Time Sheet Tips

- ✓ Be on Time! Late timesheets could affect your stipend delivery.
- ✓ Ask your coordinator if you are unsure of how to enter an activity prior to submission.
- ✓ Don't write anything in the comments unless you are prompted to do so. Things to put in comments: names of trainings, if you had a working lunch or dinner. Things **NOT** to put in the comments: off sick, long explanation of your daily activities, etc.

- ✓ When describing a training in the comments, please write the name or subject of the training. For example: “Orientation” or “Mandated Reporting”. If you attend an in-service day at your host site, write in the topics of the in-service, not simply “in-service”.
- ✓ Take Breaks! Mark ALL breaks in service. For example: if you served all morning, took a lunch break, served all afternoon, drove home, did a training in the evening via teleservice it might look like this:

7:00am- 11:00 am – Capacity Building: Program Development and Support
 11:30am -3:00pm - Capacity Building: Program Development and Support
 6:00pm -8:00pm – STEP Approved Training (Date and Name of Training in Comments)

You need to show a break of **at least** 15 minutes if serving more than 6 hours in a row on a given day.

- ✓ Please use “Virtual Training/Education” as your category if you are completing approved trainings from home.
- ✓ Do not change your service site. It will remain the same, even if you are completing a service project or supplemental service or attending a training or meeting.
- ✓ Don’t submit your timesheet prior to serving the time. For example: if you serve until 3pm, don’t submit your timesheet at 2:59PM, or it will be returned for you to resubmit.
- ✓ For a timesheet submission with “0” hours for the week:
 - This would occur if you have missed an entire week of service due to sickness, an emergency or planned time off (this must be approved by AmeriCorps staff).
 - In the comment box at the bottom of your timesheet write “I have received approval from AmeriCorps staff to submit this timesheet with no service hours”.
- ✓ Using the benchmark planner as your guide, stay within your time range. All 1700-and 1200-Hour positions must be doing a minimum of 32 hours per week and 900-Hour positions must be doing a minimum of 15 hours (most weeks) and staying within your time range to continue to receive a fulltime stipend. There may be some weeks, especially at holiday time, that you fall short of the 32 or 15 hours; that is ok if you are staying within your overall range. However, this should be discussed with STEP AmeriCorps staff so that we can monitor your hours.

Member Policies and Procedures

STEP AmeriCorps members are expected to adhere to the standards and policies contained herein. Each member will also be required to sign a STEP AmeriCorps Member Service Agreement. Refer to the STEP AmeriCorps Member Service Agreement for additional detailed provisions and guidelines.

STEP AmeriCorps is a dynamic program. As we grow, learn, change, and improve, so will our policies and practices. If policies are revised during the year, STEP AmeriCorps staff will communicate and post copies of the revisions. STEP AmeriCorps members are responsible for reviewing and consulting site staff to ensure a clear understanding of the revisions and adherence to the changes.

General Policies

Inform STEP AmeriCorps

The member must inform STEP AmeriCorps upon any changes to a member's contact information such as change of address, change of email address, or change of phone number. Additionally, members are required to inform STEP AmeriCorps if injured at the site. The member must contact the Member Development Coordinator immediately. For further information regarding injuries and worker's compensation, please refer to the section of this handbook titled "Benefits and Benefits Policies."

Office Etiquette and Dress Code

During the member's service site orientation, the site supervisor should review office etiquette with the member (e.g., what to say when answering the phone and greeting visitors at the office or service site). This will further help to orient the member to the service site. Members are expected to dress in a professional manner at the service site. Members are not only representing STEP AmeriCorps but also their host service site. A neat, clean appearance is expected at all times. At Corps meetings, more casual, comfortable dress may be acceptable. AmeriCorps apparel may be required at service projects. Members are also required to wear AmeriCorps identification while being interviewed by the media or making formal presentations unless there are extenuating circumstances. All AmeriCorps members must wear gear while in service that includes the AmeriCorps logo. Gear can include an article of clothing, a name badge or name tag with the AmeriCorps logo and/or pin. Service gear is to be worn while in service and should be removed after hours and especially when members may engage in any prohibited activities outside of service.

Personal Business

Members are discouraged from taking care of personal business, making personal phone calls, texting, snap chats, Instagram, doing schoolwork etc. while at the service site or participating in STEP AmeriCorps functions unless they have approval from their Site Supervisor or AmeriCorps Staff.

Members should not bring their own children to their service site or STEP AmeriCorps functions during the time they are collecting service hours. If unforeseen childcare difficulties should arise, then it is the responsibility of the member to coordinate their service schedule.

STEP AmeriCorps encourages members to have backup childcare arrangements in place.

The exception to this is when family and/or friends are invited to a special event.

Do's and Don'ts of AmeriCorps Service

DO

- Develop a working relationship with the service site.
- Track achievements, volunteers, and customers served for Demographic Reports.
- Cooperate with the Site Supervisor and STEP AmeriCorps Staff to address challenges and report on progress.
- Attend all STEP AmeriCorps **mandatory** meetings and service projects/events.
- Work continually toward the development and practice of leadership.
- Commit to fulfilling the mission of STEP AmeriCorps with professionalism and integrity.

- Be honest in fulfilling service hour requirements and about information regarding service activities.
- Be honest with STEP AmeriCorps Staff and Site Supervisors about all aspects of service.
- Become a positive role model at the service site and within the community.
- Obtain an email address. Email is the most efficient method of communication.

DO NOT

- Fill in for an absent employee. By law, members may not, under any circumstances, perform services, duties, or activities that are assigned to an employee or had been assigned to an employee who recently was discharged or resigned.
- Only do clerical or busy work. This may be a portion of the service, but not all of it.
- Do any activities such as lobbying, political, religious, or advocacy activities. Please see the Prohibited and Allowable Activities section of this manual for further information.
- Assist an organization with major fundraising efforts.
- Generate personal contact or relationships with clients of a partner site or service site. Such contact is unprofessional and will not be tolerated.

AmeriCorps Program Non-Harassment and Civil Rights Policy

Program Non-Harassment and Civil Rights Policy — March 18, 2021

AmeriCorps (the Corporation for National and Community Service adopted the operating name "AmeriCorps" as of September 29, 2020) has zero tolerance for unlawful harassment of any individual or group of individuals engaged in national service. AmeriCorps is committed to treating all persons with dignity and respect. Our agency prohibits all forms of discrimination and harassment based on race, color, national origin, gender, age (40 and over), religion, sexual orientation, disability (mental or physical), gender identity or expression, political affiliation, marital or parental status, pregnancy, reprisal, genetic information (including family medical history), or military service. All programs administered by or receiving federal financial assistance from AmeriCorps must be free from all forms of discrimination and harassment.

Harassment may include slurs and other verbal or physical conduct relating to an individual's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other legally-protected status when such behavior has the purpose or effect of interfering with service performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive service environment. Examples of harassing conduct include but are not limited to: explicit or implicit demands for sexual favors; pressure to engage in a romantic relationship or for dates; deliberate touching of another person without consent, leaning over, or cornering a person; repeated offensive teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions; unwanted letters, emails, or phone calls; distribution or display of offensive materials; offensive looks or gestures; gender, racial, ethnic, or religious baiting; physical assaults or other threatening behavior; and demeaning, debasing, or abusive comments or actions that intimidate.

AmeriCorps does not tolerate harassment from anyone, including any AmeriCorps employee or supervisor; a project or site employee or supervisor; a non-employee (e.g., client); a co-worker; a national service participant. Any discrimination or harassment, when identified, will result in immediate corrective action, up to and including, removal or termination of any individual engaging in such misconduct.

All recipients receiving AmeriCorps financial or volunteer assistance, including individuals, organizations, programs, and/or projects are subject to this zero-tolerance policy. Recipients must take immediate corrective action to investigate and rectify any complaints of any discrimination or harassment. Any AmeriCorps awardee permitting discrimination or harassment in violation of this policy will be subject to a finding of non-compliance, which may result in termination of federal financial assistance.

Harassment based on upon race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity or expression, political affiliation, marital or parental status, pregnancy, reprisal, genetic information, or military service is unacceptable in AmeriCorps' offices or campuses, in other service-related settings such as training sessions or service sites, and at service-related social events. I expect supervisors and managers of AmeriCorps programs and projects, when made aware of alleged discrimination or harassment by employees, national service participants, or any other individuals, to investigate and take prompt action to effectively address any discrimination or harassment. AmeriCorps prohibits any retaliatory action against a person who raises any discrimination or harassment concerns.

If you believe you have been discriminated against in violation of any civil rights laws, regulations, or this policy, or have been subject to retaliation for opposing discrimination or participating in discrimination complaint proceedings (e.g., as a complainant or witness) in any AmeriCorps program or project, contact the AmeriCorps Equal Opportunity Program (EOP). The EOP may be reached at (202) 606-7503 or eo@cns.gov.

The EOP manages national service participant civil rights and harassment concerns. You must contact the EOP within 45 calendar days of an occurrence of discrimination or harassing conduct. You are not required to use a program, project, or sponsor dispute resolution procedure before contacting the EOP. If you choose to pursue another dispute resolution procedure, it does not suspend the 45-day time limit requirement to contact the EOP. Discrimination and harassment claims brought to the attention of the EOP outside 45 calendar days of an occurrence may not be accepted for investigation in a formal complaint of discrimination.



Mal Coles
Acting Chief Executive Officer
AmeriCorps

Attendance and Tardiness

General Guidelines

Members are expected to be present at their service site at the prescribed starting time. If a situation arises that will preclude a member from being on time or present at the service site as scheduled, it is his/her responsibility to contact the site supervisor and STEP AmeriCorps staff and to make any necessary alternative arrangements.

Unexcused absences from the service site are prohibited and will lead to appropriate disciplinary action. If a member is absent from the service site without notifying his/her supervisor and the Member Coordinator, the member will be considered as having abandoned his/her service position and may be terminated from the service site and the STEP AmeriCorps.

Chronic tardiness is an issue that service site supervisors will report to the Program Manager. A meeting between the manager, the site supervisor, and the member should be held to discuss the actions necessary to end the tardiness problem. If the tardiness persists, the member may be terminated. Unexcused absences in any required activity will result in disciplinary action, including suspension and/or termination. Please see the Progressive Discipline Procedure for further information.

Member Timekeeping Policy

STEP AmeriCorps members will be expected to track time both physically and electronically. The use of a Daily Sign In/Sign Out sheet will provide a physical backup to the electronic timesheets. Members will be expected to sign in and out daily, using a hard copy timesheet. Hard copy Sign In/Sign Out sheets will be signed by site supervisors, collected monthly, and kept in the member file.

Members will also enter their time electronically using the OnCorps system. These timesheets serve as the official, legal record of the member's service term and hours served. Members are required to enter their hours into OnCorps on a weekly basis. Failure to submit timesheets in a timely fashion may result in holding the member's stipend check until timesheets are up to date.

Electronic timesheets pass through 2 levels of verification. They are first approved by the site supervisor and then reviewed for accuracy by the STEP AmeriCorps Member Development Coordinator. The STEP AmeriCorps Program Manager will also periodically review timesheets for accuracy and to monitor member hours. Additionally, PennSERVE staff may periodically review member service hours using OnCorps Reports.

Members may count no more than 20% of their hours as Professional Development and no more than 10% of their hours as Fundraising.

Members are permitted to serve at locations other than their primary service site or to complete virtual and in-person trainings, for supplemental hours as needed. Supplemental service and training must be approved by STEP AmeriCorps staff in advance using the **Supplemental Service Request Form**.

- In the case of supplemental service, the hours and activities must be recorded on a **Supplemental Service Verification Form**. This form must be signed by an employee at the site of supplemental service and submitted to STEP AmeriCorps staff. The form will be maintained in the member file.

- In the case of virtual training, the member must submit a certificate of completion or screenshot to verify completion of the training. The certificate will be maintained in the member file.

Fulltime STEP AmeriCorps members are expected to complete 1700 hours of service by the end of their service year. This is an average of 35-40 hours per week for 48 weeks. Fulltime members are expected to serve a minimum of 30 hours per week in order to receive their living stipend.

Reduced fulltime STEP AmeriCorps members are expected to complete 1200 hours of service by the end of their service year. This is an average of 30-35 hours per week for 38 weeks (most likely 42 weeks). Reduced fulltime members are expected to serve a minimum of 30 hours per week in order to receive their living stipend.

Halftime STEP AmeriCorps members are expected to complete 900 hours of service by the end of their service year. This is an average of 15-20 hours per week for 50 weeks. Halftime members are expected to serve a minimum of 15 hours per week in order to receive their stipend.

STEP AmeriCorps members' hours should follow a schedule agreed upon by both the members and their site supervisors at the beginning of the service year, based upon their service description.

When members need to take off (i.e., vacation, court appearance, medical or dental appointments, etc.) during regularly scheduled service hours, this time needs to be discussed and pre-approved by their site supervisor and STEP AmeriCorps program staff. Considerable notice should be given regarding appointments scheduled in advance, when possible. Members should complete a Time Off Request form when an absence is anticipated.

In the event of an unplanned leave of absence (i.e., illness or bereavement), members are required to follow the procedure in place at their site and notify the STEP AmeriCorps Member Development Coordinator.

The Member Coordinator will monitor member timesheets weekly and will complete a **Member Time Tracking Form** each month for each member. If a member is more than 10% below the hours in the member's hours plan/requirements, then the member will receive a written warning and an action plan to make up with time will be created. The Member Coordinator will follow up to ensure that the member's hours are back on track. If a member continues to fall behind on hours, the Progressive Discipline Procedures will be followed which could lead to suspension of the member stipend or termination from the program.

Jury Duty

Serving on a jury is an important responsibility of citizenship. To strengthen the spirit of citizenship, members are encouraged to serve jury duty and will not be penalized for doing so. During the time members serve as jurors, they will continue to accrue their normal service hours and to receive the living allowance and health benefits. Members may also keep reimbursement for incidental expenses received from the court.

Armed Forces Reserves

Generally, the Reserves of the U.S. Army, Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, The Army National Guard, and the Air National Guard requires reservists to serve one weekend a month plus 12-15 days a year. If a member has a choice as to when the 12-15-day period is served, every effort should be made to schedule the time so that it will not interfere with the AmeriCorps term of service. In the instance this time is inflexible, a two- week leave of absence will be granted

with no loss of service hours or benefits. Members may not receive time off for additional reserve related service beyond the two-week active-duty service period. No AmeriCorps service is credited for a once-a-month weekend service in the reserves. If a member is called for deployment, the STEP AmeriCorps program staff may exit the member from the program and apply for a partial education award for time served.

Teleservice

Definition and Scope:

Teleservice allows STEP AmeriCorps members to perform their duties outside of the office or service location on an as needed and as agreed upon basis. On teleservice days, a member might serve from home, or a different location as specified on the specific “Teleservice Agreement” that is acknowledged and signed between the Member and the Program Manager.

Teleservice is a cooperative arrangement between the member and the Program Manager. This is a privilege, not a universal benefit, or member’s right.

Teleservice arrangements should not be granted by the Manager when in-office service is required to deliver the specific service or accomplish the pursued goal.

This policy is only valid for STEP AmeriCorps members.

Procedure and agreement rules:

Teleservice arrangements are only awarded by written, specific documents signed by both parties, the member, and the Manager, prior to the teleservice start day. The signed agreement must specify the name of the member, the reason for the teleservice to be granted, the activities that will be performed, and a specific period for which the teleservice arrangement is granted.

Service by AmeriCorps State/National members must be delivered in-person, as a general rule, and a teleservice agreement is exceptional and a short-term tool for the program to deliver its services and achieve the annual outputs and outcomes.

Teleservice agreement between a STEP AmeriCorps member and the Program Manager must follow CNCS rules and regulations for this type of service. Additionally, members who have been approved to teleservice, must comply with all organizational rules, policies, and procedures such as all applicable IT, Security, Privacy and Confidentiality policies and procedures.

Remote service must not create problems for the member, the program participants, the projects, or the staff. The performance standards for members serving at alternate service places should be equivalent to the standards used when the AmeriCorps members are serving at their regular office. Nothing in the Teleservice Policy waives or changes standards of performance or behavior in the service place.

Teleservice may be unilaterally terminated by the Program Manager if the member violates the terms of the teleservice agreement, if the service is no longer conducive to teleservice, or if the teleservice’s performance no longer meets expected standards. Teleservice may also be suspended due to the program’s operational needs.

If the member is injured in the course and scope of performing official duties during the agreed upon service hours, regardless of service location, the member is covered under the state’s worker’s compensation law. The STEP AmeriCorps member must notify the program manager immediately and complete the incident report form.

All members must sign the “Teleservice Agreement” at orientation.

Living Allowance and Schedule:

The STEP AmeriCorps member's living allowance, benefits, and service responsibilities will not change due to participation in a teleservice arrangement.

The schedule during the teleservice period will be specified on the teleservice agreement. Under no circumstances a member can serve more than 5% (five percent) of its annual service hours based on a Teleservice agreement. The hours a member serves under a teleservice agreement must be marked on the timesheet with the following sentence "Teleservice based on signed agreement." Before approving the timesheet, the Program Manager must verify the hours claimed as "teleservice" were performed.

Eligibility:

STEP AmeriCorps members will be eligible for teleservice based on the suitability of their service to be delivered. It is not intended to be part of any member's permanent or regular service schedule. In other rare circumstances, members may be permitted to accrue service hours at home. These situations include:

- When the site is closed for a holiday.
- When there is inclement weather that prevents the member from safely getting to the site.
- When a virtual training or reading has been assigned by the Program Manager, Member Development Coordinator, or Site Supervisor and can be monitored for accountability.
- Other situations determined on a case-by-case basis by the program and/or site (i.e. emergency situations, disasters, etc.)

In order to be able to tele-serve, the member must possess the appropriate equipment to allow the service to be performed away from the central service site. The program will not be responsible for any operating costs associated with teleservice, including internet, land-line telephone, maintenance, insurance, utilities, printing costs, or mileage.

STEP AmeriCorps members requesting a teleservice arrangement must:

- Demonstrate dependability and responsibility by following through on projects and service assignment.
- Ensure that their absence from the office will not be detrimental to productivity or service quality of other AmeriCorps members or Program Staff.
- Maintain connections with their supervisor, team, and colleagues from a remote location.
- Return telephone calls, text messages, instant messages, and emails as required.

Social Media Policy

Social media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram) have become common means of communication. However, guidelines have been created in order to protect the interest of STEP AmeriCorps and its customers, the people you serve, and yourselves.

You are a representative of STEP AmeriCorps and your host site, and a positive example of service with your community, even on your personal time. Abiding by these guidelines allows for continued professional boundaries to be in place and protects all parties involved from personal and private information being shared in public ways.

Breach of these policies may result in counseling or disciplinary action, up to and including termination of your service commitment. Nothing in this policy is intended to or will be applied in a manner that limits member's rights to engage in activity on their personal social media accounts, but boundaries must be placed for safety and protection of all involved with STEP AmeriCorps.

Guidelines and information that CANNOT be shared or posted on personal social media pages include the following:

1. No "friending" or "following" children, youth, families, or customers served.
2. No pictures, videos, or Live streaming, including children, families, or customers served.
3. Confidential information about a child, family, or customer.
4. No identifying children, families, or customers served by name.
5. Negative comments regarding STEP, STEP AmeriCorps, host sites, site supervisors, or other members.

The above mentioned list is not meant to be all inclusive. If you are not sure is something is acceptable, inquire first.

Prohibited and Allowable Activities

Prohibited Member Activities

(See 45 CFR § 2520.65)

While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or CNCS, members may not engage in the following activities:

- a. Attempting to influence legislation;
- b. Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- c. Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- d. Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- e. Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- f. Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;
- g. Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- h. Providing a direct benefit to—
 - i. A business organized for profit;
 - ii. A labor union;
 - iii. A partisan political organization;
 - iv. A nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 related to engaging in political activities or substantial amount of lobbying except that nothing in these provisions shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and,
 - v. An organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (g) of this section, unless CNCS assistance is not used to support those religious activities;
- i. Conducting a voter registration drive or using CNCS funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- j. Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services*; and,
- k. Such other activities as CNCS may prohibit.

In addition to the above activities, the below activities are additionally prohibited:

Census Activities. AmeriCorps members and volunteers associated with AmeriCorps grants may not engage in census activities during service hours. Being a census taker during service hours is categorically prohibited. Census-related activities (e.g., promotion of the Census, education about the importance of the Census) do not align with AmeriCorps state and national objectives. What members and volunteers do on their own time is up to them, consistent with program policies about outside employment and activities.

Election and Polling Activities. AmeriCorps members may not provide services for election or polling locations or in support of such activities.

AmeriCorps members may not engage in the above activities directly or indirectly by recruiting, training, or managing others for the primary purpose of engaging in one of the activities listed above. Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the activities listed above on their initiative, on non-AmeriCorps time, and using non-Corporation funds. Individuals should not wear the AmeriCorps logo while doing so.

AmeriCorps members are prohibited from displacing employee services, duties or activities performed by an employee who recently resigned or was discharged; an employee who is subject to a reduction in force; an employee who is temporarily absent or is on leave.

Nonduplication. Corporation assistance may not be used to duplicate an activity that is already available in the locality of a program. And, unless the requirements of paragraph (f) of this section are met, Corporation assistance will not be provided to a private nonprofit entity to conduct activities that are the same or substantially equivalent to activities provided by a State or local government agency in which such entity resides.

Non-displacement.

- a. An employer may not displace an employee or position, including partial displacement such as reduction in hours, wages, or employment benefits, as a result of the use by such employer of a participant in a program receiving Corporation assistance.
- b. An organization may not displace a volunteer by using a participant in a program receiving Corporation assistance.
- c. A service opportunity will not be created under this chapter that will infringe in any manner on the promotional opportunity of an employed individual.
- d. A participant in a program receiving Corporation assistance may not perform any services or duties or engage in activities that would otherwise be performed by an employee as part of the assigned duties of such employee.
- e. A participant in any program receiving assistance under this chapter may not perform any services or duties, or engage in activities, that—
 - i. Will supplant the hiring of employed workers; or
 - ii. Are services, duties, or activities with respect to which an individual has recall rights pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement or applicable personnel procedures.
- f. A participant in any program receiving assistance under this chapter may not perform services or duties that have been performed by or were assigned to any—
 - i. Presently employed worker;
 - ii. Employee who recently resigned or was discharged;
 - iii. Employee who is subject to a reduction in force or who has recall rights pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement or applicable personnel procedures;
 - iv. Employee who is on leave (terminal, temporary, vacation, emergency, or sick); or
 - v. Employee who is on strike or who is being locked out.

Allowable Direct Service Activities

(See CFR § 2520.25)

- b. AmeriCorps members direct service activities must address local environmental, educational, public safety (including disaster preparedness and response), or other human needs.
- c. Direct service activities generally refer to activities that provide a direct, measurable benefit to an individual, a group, or a community.
- d. Examples of the types of direct service activities AmeriCorps members may perform include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - i. Tutoring children in reading;
 - ii. Helping to run an after-school program;
 - iii. Engaging in community clean-up projects;
 - iv. Providing health information to a vulnerable population;
 - v. Teaching as part of a professional corps;
 - vi. Providing relief services to a community affected by a disaster; and
 - vii. Conducting a neighborhood watch program as part of a public safety effort.

Allowable Capacity-Building Activities

(See CFR § 2520.30)

Capacity-building activities that AmeriCorps members perform should enhance the mission, strategy, skills, and culture, as well as systems, infrastructure, and human resources of an organization that is meeting unmet community needs. Capacity-building activities help an organization gain greater independence and sustainability.

- a. AmeriCorps members may perform capacity-building activities that advance the program's mission and goals
- b. Examples of capacity-building activities AmeriCorps members may perform include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - i. Strengthening volunteer management and recruitment, including:
 - a. Enlisting, training, or coordinating volunteers;
 - i. Helping an organization develop an effective volunteer management system;
 - ii. Organizing service days and other events in the community to increase citizen engagement;
 - iii. Promoting retention of volunteers by planning recognition events or providing ongoing support and follow-up to ensure that volunteers have a high-quality experience; and
 - iv. Assisting an organization in reaching out to individuals and communities of different backgrounds when encouraging volunteering to ensure that a breadth of experiences and expertise is represented in service activities.
 - ii. Conducting outreach and securing resources in support of service activities that meet specific needs in the community;
 - iii. Helping build the infrastructure of the sponsoring organization, including:
 - a. Conducting research, mapping community assets, or gathering other information that will strengthen the sponsoring organization's ability to meet community needs;
 - b. Developing new programs or services in a sponsoring organization seeking to expand;
 - c. Developing organizational systems to improve efficiency and effectiveness;
 - d. Automating organizational operations to improve efficiency and effectiveness;
 - e. Initiating or expanding revenue-generating operations directly in support of service activities; and
 - f. Supporting staff and board education.
 - iv. Developing collaborative relationships with other organizations working to achieve similar goals in the community, such as:
 - a. Community organizations, including faith-based organizations;
 - b. Foundations;
 - c. Local government agencies;
 - d. Institutions of higher education; and
 - e. Local education agencies or organizations.

Fundraising and Grant Writing

In general, AmeriCorps members cannot assist their organizations with major fundraising efforts. However, CNCS policy permits some limited activities related to fundraising by AmeriCorps members only under special circumstances with pre-approval by Program Director to the extent that such activities:

- a. Provide immediate and direct support to a specific and direct activity;
- b. Fall within the program's approved direct service objectives;
- c. Are not the primary activities of the program;
- d. Do not involve significant amounts of time for any member. (No more than 10% of total member hours)

Members May:

- a. Solicit supplies from local businesses for a direct service project - e.g., solicit several cans of paint from a store near a work site to meet a need.
- b. Organize an occasional "serve-a-thon" in which members recruit individuals to obtain service sites in advance of an approved direct service event.

- c. Seek donations of books from companies and individuals for a program in which volunteers tutor children to read.
- d. Write a grant proposal to a foundation to secure resources to support the training of volunteers.
- e. Secure supplies and equipment from the community to enable volunteers to help build houses for low-income individuals.
- f. Secure financial resources from the community to assist a faith-based or community-based organization in launching or expanding a program that provides social services to the members of the community and is delivered, in whole or in part, through the members of the faith-based organization.
- g. Seek a donation from alumni of the program for specific service projects being performed by current members.

Members May Not:

- a. Prepare any part of a grant proposal or perform other fundraising functions to help the service site achieves the match requirement, or to pay the organization's general operating expenses.
- b. Write grant applications for AmeriCorps funding or for any other funding provided by the AmeriCorps Agency.
- c. Write grant applications for funding provided by any other federal agencies.

Always check with STEP AmeriCorps staff before engaging in any activity or service that you think may be considered fund raising to avoid any issues or uncountable hours.

Firearms/Dangerous Weapons Policy

Under no circumstances may a member of the STEP AmeriCorps, in the performance of their duties or during any association with AmeriCorps, carry, conceal, or have on their person a firearm or dangerous weapon. Legally licensed or otherwise, firearms are strictly forbidden and possessions of such during service hours are grounds for immediate dismissal.

Drug-Free Workplace Policy

Law: Federal grant recipients and contractors are required by law to certify that they operate a drug-free workplace. This certification is based upon implementing policies and procedures that demonstrate that the employer has taken steps to create and maintain a workplace that is drug-free.

Policy: STEP, Inc., recognizes dependency on alcohol and other drugs as an illness and a major health problem. Employees needing help in dealing with such problems are encouraged to contact their supervisors, the Assistant Director or Executive Director. Conscientious efforts to seek such help will not jeopardize any employee's job and will not be noted in any personnel record; however, constructive disciplinary measures may be utilized to provide motivation to seek assistance where it is noted the employee's work performance is affected. Rehabilitation itself is the responsibility of the employee. Normal STEP, Inc., health care benefits, such as medical leave and the group medical plan, in accordance with its terms, will be available to provide financial assistance throughout the rehabilitation and counseling process. The Assistant Director will assist in coordinating the obtaining of professional help as well as coordinating necessary health insurance requirements. Confidentiality in all such contacts will be strictly maintained.

STEP, Inc., is particularly concerned with those situations where the use of alcohol or other drugs interferes with the employee's health, safety, and job performance, or adversely affects the job performance or safety of other staff or program participants, or is considered detrimental to STEP, Inc., operations. Such alcohol or drug use will not be tolerated.

- Employees and AmeriCorps members are prohibited from participating in the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation and/or use of a controlled substance in the workplace, whether on STEP premises or while conducting STEP business off premises. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action and may have legal consequences.
- Employees and AmeriCorps members are expected and required to report to work/service on time and in appropriate mental and physical condition for work. Whenever an employee's observed behavior raises a reasonable suspicion of drug or alcohol use, that employee will not be permitted to continue work until it is determined his/her return will not present a potential health, safety, or security problem in the workplace. Such absence will be without pay and will also be subject to disciplinary action.
- No prescription drug will be brought on any STEP, Inc., premises by any person other than the one for whom it is prescribed. *Such drugs will be used only in the manner, combination, and quantity prescribed. Employees who take over the counter or prescribed medications are responsible for being aware of any effect the medication may have on the performance of their duties.

It should be noted that partner host site already having policies regarding the possession and administration of prescription medication by staff to children, i.e., Head Start, would still follow those program policies. The section of the revised Drug-Free Workplace Policy which states "no prescription drug will be brought on any STEP, Inc., premises by any person other than the one for whom it is prescribed" applies to the possession and consumption of such medication by themselves and would not apply to possessing and administering prescription medication to children under staff care, so long as program policies and procedures are followed.

- No alcoholic beverages will be brought into or consumed on STEP premises.
- Any employee convicted of any criminal drug statute or a violation occurring in the workplace must notify the Executive Director of such conviction within five days. Any AmeriCorps member convicted of any criminal drug statute or a violation occurring in the workplace or service site must notify the AmeriCorps Program Staff of such conviction within five days.

Member Resignation

Suspension of Service and Leave for Compelling Circumstances

If a member becomes medically incapacitated, pregnant, a family member in the member's care becomes dependent, or any personal circumstance arises that makes it impossible to serve, the service year may be postponed without benefits for a period of up to 6 weeks at the discretion of the program director.

Compelling circumstances will not include time conflicts with another job or school. Please contact program staff for more information should this become necessary. Written documentation and a medical excuse will be required for a decision to be rendered.

Voluntary Resignation

Members wishing to resign prior to completing their term of service must submit a written notice of resignation 15-30 days prior to the effective date, to their site supervisor and program manager. The member's notice must include appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's note) if there are compelling personal circumstance to be considered. Failure to complete a term of service will result in the forfeiture of the entire educational award. All benefits, including the living stipend, and loan forbearance, cease upon final date of service. Upon resignation, members must return all property to the service site (i.e., keys, books, files). References post service will not be considered if a member terminates their position for cause

Involuntary Termination/Discharge

The following are grounds for termination for cause from the STEP AmeriCorps:

- Conviction of a felony.
- Stealing or causing to be stolen any STEP AmeriCorps or service site property.
- Defacing or willfully damaging any STEP AmeriCorps or service site property.
- Fighting, carrying weapons (licensed or illegal), or threatening physical violence.
- Being verbally or physically abusive.
- Refusing to follow supervisor's instructions. Insubordination.
- Using illegal drugs.
- Reporting to work under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Being absent or late without an approved excuse or without contacting site.
- Chronic tardiness or absence.
- Becoming an administrative burden through a demonstrated pattern of misconduct.
- Any other inappropriate or unprofessional behavior.

Reassignment

STEP AmeriCorps recognizes that circumstances, on occasion, may lead to the need for new assignments for members. In this instance, STEP AmeriCorps will make every attempt to find a placement for a displaced member; however, STEP AmeriCorps cannot guarantee placement. Simply being dissatisfied with a site assignment does not constitute a reason for reassignment. Reassignment generally takes place when a host site is no longer able to support a member position for various reasons. This reassignment would be at the discretion of STEP AmeriCorps.

Conflict Management Procedures

It is expected that normal communication and conflict resolution processes will resolve performance, attitude, attendance, and other personnel related issues. However, seemingly small-unresolved issues can compound and become major problems causing frustration and often resulting in an irreparable situation. Therefore, STEP's AmeriCorps has established the following conflict management process, which is required for addressing normal personnel issues.

If a member needs to be alerted to an infraction with regards to procedural and or STEP AmeriCorps contractual obligations, the program manager will advise the program director who will issue the member an intervention notice. The intervention notice will outline the infraction and serve as written documentation. If a second intervention notice must be issued, then the program manager will initiate the conflict management process at STEP 2. If a third intervention notice is issued, the program director the program manager, and site supervisor will meet to determine a course of action which may include termination from the program.

Process

STEP 1

Member <-> Site Supervisor

If a conflict arises at the service site, the member and their immediate site supervisor should set up a meeting to define the problem and indicate acceptable resolutions. An action plan may be developed to set a timeline for corrective actions to be implemented. If applicable, set up a second meeting date and time to review the status of the action plan and make any corrections or changes

that may be needed. The STEP AmeriCorps program manager should be notified of the problem and the actions being taken to resolve the situation.

STEP 2

Member <-> Program Manager/Director <-> Site Supervisor

If the problem has not been resolved within the timeline that was set up during the initial meeting, the program manager should be contacted to facilitate a meeting between the site supervisor and the member in order to review the situation and to help develop a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict. A follow up meeting between all parties involved should be scheduled at this time to ensure resolution and closure has been achieved.

STEP 3

Member <-> Program Manager/Director <-> STEP Director of HR <-> Site Supervisor

If the conflict has not been successfully resolved within the timeline previously agreed upon, then the STEP AmeriCorps Program Manager will meet with all parties to determine a final course of action, to include possible termination of contractual agreements.

Progressive Discipline Procedure

When a member fails to comply with the Member Code of Conduct, STEP AmeriCorps staff may initiate the Progressive Discipline Procedure. At all stages, members can discuss the discipline process with STEP AmeriCorps staff.

LEVEL 1 VIOLATION

The Member Development Coordinator will sit down with the member to discuss the violation(s), review the Code of conduct, and suggest corrective behavior. If necessary, appropriate mandatory training or coaching will be assigned. The violation(s) will be documented on an Official Level 1 Warning Notice given to the member during this meeting, which will be signed by the Member Development Coordinator and the member's Site Supervisor. The Level 1 Warning Notice will be placed in the member's file.

The Member Development Coordinator will schedule a follow-up meeting within 30 days of the Level 1 Violation Meeting. If violation(s) are still in occurrence at the time of the 30-day follow-up, a Level 2 Warning Notice will be issued.

The member will acknowledge via signature, that the Level 1 Violation Meeting occurred and will sign the Level 1 Warning Receipt Form. If the member wishes, he or she may submit an explanation of the behavior, which will also be placed in the member's file.

Level 1 violations include, but are not limited to:

- Tardiness
- Failure to wear appropriate clothing to service site.
- Late submission of reports, timesheets, or student progress data.
- Offenses as determined by Site Supervisor and/or STEP AmeriCorps staff.

LEVEL 2 VIOLATION

If the behavior/situation recurs or if the member breaks other rules, the Member Development Coordinator will sit down with the member to discuss the violation(s), review the Code of conduct, and suggest corrective behavior. The member will be issued a Level 2 Warning Notice by the Member Development Coordinator during that meeting. In addition, the member will be placed on a Disciplinary Contract. A Disciplinary Contract includes a statement of the problem, a reference to the previous warning, a statement of responsibility of the member to correct the problem, a statement of consequences if the issue is not resolved, and an action plan developed by the member to correct the problem(s)/violation(s) within 30 days. If necessary, additional mandatory training/coaching will be assigned. The Level 2 Warning Notice will be kept in the member file along with the member's written response.

The Member Development Coordinator will schedule a follow-up meeting within 30 days of the Level 2 Violation Meeting. If violation(s) are still in occurrence at the time of the 30-day follow-up, a Level 3 Warning Notice will be issued, and the Program Manager will get involved. Consequences of moving to a Level 3 Violation include suspension without pay or termination.

Level 2 violations include, but are not limited to:

- No shows and unexcused absences including training and service projects.
- Being argumentative with host site supervisor(s)/staff members, or service recipients.
- Abuse of leave
- Inappropriate language or actions with service recipients, team members, and/or host site supervisor(s)/staff members.
- Offenses as determined by Site Supervisor and/or STEP AmeriCorps staff.

LEVEL 3 VIOLATION

If terms outlined in the member's disciplinary contract are not fulfilled or, in the case of serious misconduct, the Program Manager will determine whether to release the member for cause. However, a Level 3 Violation immediately warrants suspension without pay or benefits for at least one pay period. Upon continual violation(s) in the first 2 levels or upon serious violations that warrant an immediate Level 3 Violation, the Program Manager and Member Development Coordinator will sit down with the member to discuss the violation(s), number of occurrences, review the Code of Conduct, and suggest corrective behavior. The member will be issued a Level 3 Warning Notice by the Program Manager during that meeting. The member will be immediately placed on a suspension for at least one pay period if termination is not otherwise decided at this point. This suspension will be without pay, or benefits and the member will not have an opportunity to make up the hours missed. In addition, the member will be placed on a Final Disciplinary Contract. A Disciplinary Contract includes a statement of the problem, a reference to the previous warning, a statement of responsibility of the member to correct the problem, a statement of consequences if the issue is not resolved, and an action plan developed by the member to correct the problem(s)/violation(s) within 30 days. If necessary, additional mandatory training/coaching will be assigned. The Level 3 Warning Notice will be kept in the member file along with the member's written response.

The Member Development Coordinator will schedule a follow-up meeting within 30 days of the Level 3 Violation Meeting. If violation(s) are still in occurrence at the time of the 30-day follow-up, the member will be terminated for cause from the program.

Level 3 violations include, but are not limited to:

- Fighting or being physically abusive
- Unauthorized contact with clients (including phone, e-mail or contact outside service activities)
- Misrepresenting affiliation with STEP AmeriCorps, STEP Inc, or partner host site.

- Offenses as determined by Site Supervisor and/or STEP AmeriCorps staff.

LEVEL 4 VIOLATION

The following violations will result in immediate termination from the AmeriCorps program, without the prior 3 violation levels needing to take place. Additionally, if a member has received all 3 violation notices and continues to incur violations, a Level 4 Violation will be appropriate for the member at that point and a termination letter will be given to the member. The member will be terminated from the program and will be provided with the grievance procedure.

Level 4 violations include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to notify STEP AmeriCorps staff of any criminal arrest or conviction within 5 days.
- Harassment.
- Possessing or consuming drugs/alcohol during service activities.
- Offenses as determined by Site Supervisor and/or AmeriCorps staff.

At any point and upon any violation, STEP AmeriCorps staff determines the sequence in imposing a sanction. Dependent upon the seriousness of the violation or the number of violations present, STEP AmeriCorps staff may choose to skip any levels of violations and move right to suspension of a member or termination of the member's position.

Suspension Policy

STEP AmeriCorps may temporarily suspend a member for minor disciplinary reasons, such as chronic tardiness, failing to attend mandatory STEP AmeriCorps meetings and events, failing to communicate with Host Site and STEP AmeriCorps staff, and/or failing to submit timesheets and due paperwork on time.

If the member is charged with a violent felony or sale or distribution of a controlled substance, or convicted of possession of a controlled substance, ***the supervisor must suspend the member without any AmeriCorps benefits, including living allowance, and without receiving credit for hours missed.***

During any suspension, the member will NOT receive the living allowance and hours that were missed MUST be made up.

NOTE: Being suspended shows up on the Federal Database; meaning that it shows up even after you successfully complete your service term. If/when, you apply for a federal or a state job, it will show up.

Grievances

Grievance Procedure

The STEP AmeriCorps grievance procedure has been established as an outlet for members to attempt to resolve service-related issues that cannot be adequately addressed by using the conflict management process. Also, when a member believes that an action taken by a site supervisor, a coworker, or another member may have or will have an adverse impact on standing or service status, or when a member wishes to contest an unsatisfactory performance evaluation, at any level, then a grievance may be filed.

Grievance Hearing

The member should provide a written explanation of the grievance to the STEP AmeriCorps program manager and provide copies to all parties involved in the conflict. This must occur within 1 year of the termination or incident. A hearing must be held within 30 calendar days after filing the grievance, and a decision must be made no later than 60 calendar days after the filing of the grievance. A person who has not participated in any previous decisions concerning the issue in dispute must conduct arbitration hearings.

Binding Arbitration

The opportunity for binding arbitration will be provided in the event a grievance hearing decision is adverse to the aggrieved party or if no decision is made within 60 days of filing the grievance. The arbitrator must be independent and selected by agreement of the parties. An arbitration proceeding must be held no later than 45 calendar days after the request for arbitration. An arbitration decision must be made no later than 30 calendar days after the commencement of the arbitration proceeding.

Site Visits

The primary responsibilities of the Program Manager and the Member Coordinator include monitoring programs, maintaining communication with service sites and members, and building and maintaining STEP AmeriCorps relationships. This is done via telephone calls, written correspondence, e-mail, and most importantly, regular service site visits. This interaction is considered, by STEP AmeriCorps, key to a successful year of service.

At the visit, the Program Manager and/or Member Coordinator may meet with the member and the site supervisor both individually and as a group. The Program Manager is there to answer any questions, discuss issues that have arisen, talk with the member and site supervisor about what the member is doing, hear success stories, meet coworkers, and observes the quality of the relationship between the member, site supervisor, service site, and surrounding community. Visits add to the information that the Program Manager uses to monitor the service site and the member and ensures that they are on track with achieving the goals set for the year.

Any change to the accepted service description as indicated in the member contract requires written approval by the STEP AmeriCorps Program Manager. Copies of any adjustments made, will be filed with STEP AmeriCorps.

Member Benefits

General Benefits

Members may receive:

- A taxable living stipend while actively serving
- Individual health insurance for full-time members, if applicable.
- Worker’s Compensation for injuries occurring during service hours in compliance with STEP’s claim guidelines.
- A taxable post-service education award issued in voucher form upon successful completion of the term of service, to be used for further education or repayment of qualified student loans.
- Opportunities for personal and professional development, the acquisition of a network of professional contacts, chances to influence the direction of an institution and the community surrounding it, opportunities to be part of enhancing the impact made by a community service institution, and a chance to make a difference and become part of the national service movement.
- Opportunity to learn and practice community leadership and management.
- Access to AmeriCorps Alumni network

Living Allowance Stipend

All members are entitled to receive a living stipend while actively serving in the STEP AmeriCorps program year as designated by contractual agreement. “Actively serving” for fulltime members is defined in the member agreement as serving a minimum of 30 hours per week, and for a halftime member as serving a minimum of 15 hours per week. However, adequate progress towards achieving the hour service commitment requirement must be demonstrated or service and benefits may be suspended until an action plan is developed that reflects reasonable attainment of goals. In addition, once a member is terminated from the active roles for any reason, the stipend stops the day of termination.

The distribution of the living stipend is dependent upon the start and end dates of the service assignment. The service site chooses under which contractual service period (see chart below) the AmeriCorps member will serve. Once a service site has assigned a service period, there will be no alterations to that assigned time period.

The maximum fulltime living stipend for 2024-2025 is \$18,700.00.
The maximum reduced fulltime living stipend for 2024-2025 is \$11,875.00
The maximum halftime living stipend for 2023-2024 is \$9,000.00.

Contracted Service Year	Service Year Start Date	Service Year End Date	# of Pays/Stipends
Fulltime/Halftime Terms	August 21, 2024	July 25, 2025	25
Reduced Fulltime Terms	August 21, 2023	May 2, 2025	19

Please note that the maximum amount of the living stipend will be divided across the number of pay dates in your contract. For example, a fulltime term is max \$18,700/25 pays which equals a \$748.00 gross biweekly living stipend.

The living stipend is not a wage, but rather a stipend to help with normal living expenses while serving. Several points to consider regarding the living stipend:

- The living stipend is taxable income; STEP, Inc. does deduct local taxes
- The living stipend will cease immediately upon resignation, termination, or completion.

- AmeriCorps positions are not eligible for unemployment compensation benefits, and the receipt of the living stipend will not be counted towards time as being employed.
- Members are participants in a national service program and not considered employees.

Tax Information

The living stipend is taxable and W2 forms will be issued by STEP, Inc. Please notify program staff or the fiscal office at (570) 326-0587 if you do not receive a check on payday. If your name or address changes after your term of service is completed, please contact the STEP AmeriCorps program manager. Please be aware that STEP, Inc. does take local taxes out of the living stipend.

Travel and Reimbursement

Pending budget and funding availability members may receive limited mileage reimbursement for travel expenses incurred for mandatory STEP AmeriCorps events. This reimbursement will be paid at the current rate for STEP, Inc. Mileage is calculated based on the distance between the service project or training and either the member's home or service site, whichever is the shortest distance. Reimbursement for expenses incurred as a result of service performed as part of the member's service site duties, should be reimbursed by the service site. These arrangements are between the member and the service site.

STEP AmeriCorps travel and expense vouchers are paid as a reimbursement only. All expenses must be approved by STEP AmeriCorps prior to payment. Vouchers with original signatures must be submitted; no fax copies will be accepted. Original receipts, if applicable, must be attached. Failure to submit expense reports as indicated may result in denial of reimbursement.

Health Benefits

Health benefits are available to all full-time members who do not already have a health insurance plan. Please be aware that this insurance policy is Affordable Care Act Compliant. The plan provides you with basic coverage during your short-term position. The policy will cover some basic health care related needs but is not necessarily designed to cover elective procedures. Read the explanation of benefits carefully to be aware of your coverage limitations. If a copy of the health plan information was not received at the start of the program year, the Program Manager should be informed so that they can ensure that the information is received. All full-time members that do not opt for coverage through STEP AmeriCorps will be required to indicate a waiver of the benefits and provide proof of coverage.

Worker's Compensation

Members are eligible for worker's compensation. Guidelines must be followed if injured while serving. You must report a worker's compensation claim even if you do not immediately require medical care. If you are injured while serving, you must call the STEP AmeriCorps Member Development Coordinator immediately. If you cannot reach the Member Development Coordinator, call the Program Manager. STEP AmeriCorps Program Staff will arrive at the location of your injury to assess the situation and fill out the required worker's compensation packet with you. STEP AmeriCorps will then walk through the process with you regarding you seeking medical treatment and follow-up.

Student Loan Forbearance

AmeriCorps members are eligible to have the repayment of certain student loans postponed while they are earning an education award. This postponement, called forbearance, is not automatic. The trust does not grant forbearances, only the loan holder can do that. The trust merely verifies

membership in AmeriCorps and forwards the information on to the loan holder. Most qualified student loans that are in default are not eligible for forbearance.

Members must create an on-line account in order to apply for forbearance. There is a paper form available if you do not have Internet access, however, this will substantially slow the process. If a member does not hear from the loan holder within 3-4 weeks of submitting the forbearance form, the loan holder should be contacted to verify receipt of the forbearance request. The loan holder may have additional requirements to put the loan in forbearance. If you need to contact the National Service Trust, call, 1-888-507-5962. Upon completion of all program requirements, the interest that accrued on a loan while in forbearance will be reimbursed at up to 100% for full-time members and up to 50% for part-time members. The interest that is paid is taxable. It is the member’s responsibility to notify the lender if termination from the program is earlier than pre-designated.

Segal Education Award

Upon successful completion of the member’s term of service, the member will receive the Segal education award from the National Service Trust; named for Eli Segal, the first AmeriCorps CEO.

2024-2025 Education Award Amounts		
Term	Number of Hours	Education Award
Fulltime	1700	\$7,395.00
Reduce Fulltime	1200	\$5,176.50
Half time	900	\$3,679.50
Reduced Half Time	675	\$2,817.14
Quarter Time	450	\$1,956.35
Minimum Time	300	\$1,565.08

Application for the educational award will be made as soon as the service term is completed, and members have provided all required closeout documentation to the STEP AmeriCorps office. (E.g.; final time logs, activity log, evaluation, etc.) Once the paperwork is processed, the member will receive a letter from CNCS that will provide the award amount and the instructions for redemption. The award will be held in the national trust for up to 7 years. The member may use the education award to:

- Repay qualified student loans
- Pay for current educational expenses at a Title IV institution of higher education. The term “current” educational expenses mean expenses incurred for a period of enrollment in an institution of higher education that begins after an individual enrolls in a term of service as an AmeriCorps member.
- Pay for expenses incurred in participating in an approved school to work program.
- Members at least 55 years of age prior to start of service year may transfer education award to child, foster child, or grandchild.

Members can split up their awards to pay a combination of student loans or educational expenses. Not all schools or loans are eligible. The payment will be made to the school or loan holder designated by the member. The payment cannot be made to the member. However, as with other federal student assistance, schools may pass on to students’ certain allowances that are included in the cost of attendance or reimburse students for certain out-of-pocket expenses. If an individual is enrolled in a Title IV eligible program at a Title IV institution of higher education, he or she may use his or her education award to pay for the cost of attending either as a full-time or part-time student. “Cost of attendance” (COA) is a term used by a school’s Financial Aid Office following rules established by the U.S. Congress and the Department of Education.

AmeriCorps legislation defines the student loan as “qualified” if the loan is backed by the federal government under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (except PLUS loans to parents of students)

or under Titles VII or VIII of the Public Health Service Act. Now, in addition, a provision in the 2002 appropriations law has expanded this definition to include loans that cover all or part of the student's cost of attendance and that are made directly to the student by a state agency.

For purposes of the AmeriCorps education award, the term "state agency" includes state institutions of higher education. Thus, any loan, including short-term loans, made directly to the student by a state institution of higher education is a qualified loan and the student may repay such a loan with the AmeriCorps education award. If a loan is guaranteed by a state agency (such as a state's Higher Education Authority) but is not made by a state agency, the loan is NOT qualified. A qualified loan must be made by a state agency.

The "maker" of every loan should be listed on the loan's Promissory Note. The maker is the entity that originally issued the loan to the student. The maker of the loan does not change, even if another loan company purchases the loan. Thus, a promissory note is the best evidence of who originally made the loan. When a loan is refinanced or consolidated a new loan is created. The new loan must meet the definition of "qualified student loan" in order for the payment to be made using the educational award. The original loan no longer exists.

Some of the most common qualified loans are:

- Stafford Loans
- Supplemental Loans for Students (SLS)
- Perkins Loans
- Federal Direct Loans
- Federal Consolidated Loans
- Health Education Assistance Loans (HEAL)
- Health professions student Loans
- Loans made directly to members by a state agency

Questions regarding the education award may be answered by contacting the Education trust at 888-507-5962 or check www.my.americorps.gov

Creating An Online Account

Every member will need to create an online account with the Corporation for National and Community Service that will allow you to apply for forbearance and track the disbursement of your education award. To create an account, go to www.my.americorps.gov, and follow these STEPs:

- Go to the third section marked "individuals" and click on "AmeriCorps Online Payment System"
- Click on "register"
- Click on "register to create a new member account"

STEP AmeriCorps strongly recommends tracking your educational award disbursements to avoid discrepancies, by creating an online account.

Tax Information

Education awards and any interest that has been paid on a loan in forbearance are taxable. When you use any or your entire educational award, you will be responsible for reporting that amount as income when you file your federal taxes for that year. You should receive a 1099 form from The Corporation for National and Community Service for any amount paid on your behalf in excess of \$600.00. This includes any interest that was paid on your behalf. If the amount that was paid on your behalf is less than \$600.00, you will not receive a 1099 form, but you are still responsible for reporting any amount paid on your behalf as income for the tax year in which it was paid.

Non-traditional Uses of The Education Award

The AmeriCorps education award was designed primarily to help pay for school tuition and/or repay qualified student loans. But it can also be used in nontraditional ways. Here are some you may not be aware of:

Other types of schools

Generally, you can use the education award to go to any school that offers federal student aid (such as Stafford loans). These schools are known through the Department of Education as Title IV. If you would like to go to massage school, culinary school or a trade school, you can use the education award as long as they are listed as Title IV and offer federal student aid. Sometimes, there will be two massage schools in a town and one of them will be listed as Title IV while the other is not. It might take some research to find the school that will accept your education award. For example, there's a school in Wyoming called the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) that isn't listed as Title IV but accepts the education award. You can learn more about it at www.nols.edu/

Going to school overseas

A number of schools in Canada, Mexico, and Europe are listed as Title IV. In other words, American students can receive U.S. financial aid to attend. At these schools, you can use your education award to pay for tuition. To find out whether an institution is Title IV, you can look up schools at www.fafsa.ed.gov/fotw0405/fslookup.htm or call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-433-3243. If a school is NOT listed as Title IV but you would still like to attend while using your education award, you might be able to enroll in a school stateside and participate in an exchange program. That way, you are paying your tuition to a school inside the U.S. (The Evergreen State College, for example) while attending a school overseas (University of Vienna, for example). To make this option work, it will take a bit of effort on your part to find a program that will allow you to do this and to make it work.

Non-degree programs

You can also use your Ed award to take a class here and there at a community college or public university. You can take classes like guitar, swimming, or photography. If you take one or two classes per quarter at a community college, you can make your Ed award last for years and get a great deal of enrichment.

Matching schools

A number of colleges and universities encourage AmeriCorps alumni to attend by offering scholarships to former National Service participants.

How can I make the most of my education award when I apply it toward my loans?

When you use all or part of your education award to repay your student loans, it may be in your best interests to let the lender know in writing how you would like to pay. Here's an example: If you submit your voucher to a lender like Sallie Mae without instructions, they will automatically advance your payments for you.

If your payments are \$100 a month and you submit a voucher for \$4,725, Sallie Mae will advance you 47 payments, and you won't have to make another payment for the next four years. An arrangement like this might suit your lifestyle nicely.

However, when this happens, Sallie Mae is applying your education award payment first toward interest and less toward principal. By providing written instructions to Sallie Mae once you submit your on-line request, you can ask them to apply your education award payment toward the principal.

That will reduce your payments—for example; your monthly payment could go from \$100 down to \$65 a month. At the same time, you will need to start making payments right away, but you'll pay far less over the life of the loan.

Should I consolidate my loans now while rates are still low?

You may want to consider this if you can get a better interest rate by consolidating one or more “old” student loans. Here are important points to keep in mind:

- Make sure the “new” consolidated loan is a qualified student loan. Otherwise, you will not be able to use your education award to pay for it.
- If you are consolidating during your service year while your loans are in forbearance (basically, being postponed), make sure you work with the National Service Trust (1-888-507-5962) at every STEP of the process. When you have finished the terms of your service, the Trust will pay the interest that accrued on your loans during your service year. If you consolidate (pay off your old loans and create a new loan) midyear, the Trust may not be able to pay your interest for you.
- Read the fine print. When you take out a new student loan, make sure you know all the fees before you agree to the terms. If there is a \$500 loan origination fee on a \$1,000 loan, it might not make financial sense—even if the new loan has a more favorable interest rate.

Americorps Frequently Asked Questions

Are AmeriCorps members employees?

No. Members are not employees; you are a participant in National Service Organization. Members provide a “Term of Service” for one year. Think of it as a training time, a time to explore and discover if you are on the right track with what you want to be doing in the future. You are not “working”, you are serving.

Can members qualify for unemployment if they leave the program?

No. Members are not employees, they do not qualify for Unemployment Compensation at the end of their term of service.

Do members receive health benefits?

Yes. Health benefits are through Summit America and The Corps Network Health Insurance Plan and are available to full time and reduced full time members who do not already have health care coverage. Should you elect to receive AmeriCorps health benefits, the Program Manager will enroll you and provide you with information about your coverage.

Are there childcare options?

Yes. Gap Solutions is the AmeriCorps Child Care Plan found at:

- <https://www.americorpschildcare.com/>
- 1-855-886-0687

What happens if service hours are completed early? Is the member done?

If a member completes their hours before the program year ends, the living stipend ends. However, members may serve beyond 1700 hours and as long as they continue to serve at their service site, they will continue to receive the living stipend until the end of the program year and are expected to continue serving until the end of the term.

If a member serves beyond 1700 hours, they may qualify for a Presidential Service Award. View: <http://www.presidentialserviceawards.gov/>

Can a member serve places other than his or her site?

Yes. Hours served away from the member’s host site, must ALWAYS have approval from the program staff prior to serving the hours and must fill out an off-site supplemental hour verification form. The form should be turned into the STEP AmeriCorps office within the time period served. The hours served away from the members host site must not conflict with the hours at the host site unless it is a mandatory service event with STEP AmeriCorps.

When do members get paid?

Stipend checks are direct deposit. Members are not permitted to pick up a stipend check unless they have an unusual circumstance. The STEP AmeriCorps office needs to be notified several days prior to the check mail date.

Are members permitted to miss member meetings/trainings or mandatory service projects because of service site commitments?

No. STEP AmeriCorps member meetings and group projects take priority over your site. The site must be able to function without their AmeriCorps member. Site supervisors have the member meeting and mandatory service project schedule as do members. Please plan accordingly,

Some useful websites for reference:

- <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriacorps>
- (you will find information on the Ed Award Here)
- www.americorpsalums.org
- <http://www.presidentialserviceawards.gov/>

Member required monthly documentation and data collection materials, the 2024-2025 service year calendar, and useful website links can be found on the Member Portal on the STEP Website.

<https://www.stepcorp.org/step-pathways/community-collaboration/member-portal.html>

This Handbook is intended for use with the 2024-2025 Service Year.
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