



EVERYONE CAN *Serve*



National Service Resources for Disability
Organizations and Individuals



Volunteer
West Virginia

The State's Commission for National and Community Service

Corporation for
NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE 

National Service and Inclusion

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is a federal agency that was formed to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in national service to meet community needs. National service helps community organizations implement projects or ideas that often require additional “people power,” special funding, or other types of assistance.

Each year, CNCS engages millions of Americans in national service opportunities through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs. These programs address the important issues of education, the environment, public safety, homeland security and other critical areas.

Most states throughout the country have a governor-appointed commission for national and community service and a CNCS state office. CNCS state offices provide support for and administer AmeriCorps*VISTA and Senior Corps national service program grants.

Volunteer West Virginia is the state’s Commission for National and Community Service and challenges West Virginians of all ages and backgrounds to strengthen their communities through service and volunteerism. Though each state’s commission role differs, most commissions support national service programs and administer AmeriCorps*State grants, among other things.

Many state commissions have disability coordinators who are responsible for ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to actively participate in national service programs like AmeriCorps through federally-provided Disability Placement Funds. These funds are used for the placement of, and reasonable accommodation and auxiliary services for, active and potential national service members with disabilities serving in any AmeriCorps*State, AmeriCorps*VISTA, or Senior Corps program.

Reasonable Accommodations for All National Service Programs

The individuals and organizations that direct and manage national service programs receive special training on how to provide reasonable accommodations to members and volunteers with disabilities. Programs may also access funds to pay for reasonable accommodations as needed.



What is AmeriCorps?

AmeriCorps is a national service program often referred to as the “Domestic Peace Corps.” People who join AmeriCorps commit to a year of service in exchange for a modest living stipend and an education award. AmeriCorps is committed to the inclusion of qualified individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation or other non-merit factors. AmeriCorps is a real-life education and service experience wrapped into three branches: *State and *National; *VISTA; and *NCCC.

What Do AmeriCorps Members Do?

- **AmeriCorps*State and *National** – Individuals who join AmeriCorps*State and *National programs are called “members” and provide direct service in the areas of education, human needs, public safety, environment or homeland security, among many others. Members in West Virginia have tutored children, assisted disabled veterans, and restored historic buildings, just to name a few projects. Members have also coordinated community programs, recruited community volunteers, or served in school settings. There are hundreds of different AmeriCorps opportunities available, including full-time and less than full-time positions.



- ▶ **AmeriCorps*VISTA** – Individuals who join AmeriCorps*VISTA programs are known as *VISTA members or “VISTAs.” VISTAs provide capacity-building service to address the issue of poverty, specifically. VISTAs work with nonprofit organizations and local government agencies to create or expand programs that bring individuals and communities out of poverty. VISTAs in West Virginia help build and sustain programs that address the issues of education, healthy futures, economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, veterans and military families, and disaster services.
- ▶ **AmeriCorps*NCCC** – Individuals who join AmeriCorps*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) are 18-24 years of age and serve in a full-time, team-based residential program at one of five regional campuses around the United States. These members serve in teams of eight to twelve and travel throughout the region covered by their base campus to complete service projects that meet critical needs in communities in five areas: disaster services; environmental stewardship; energy conservation; urban and rural development; and infrastructure improvement. AmeriCorps*NCCC members stationed in West Virginia have helped plant trees, construct hiking trails, renovate buildings, weatherize homes, and address disaster-related events as needed.

Who Can Join AmeriCorps?

AmeriCorps*State and *National program members must be at least 17 years of age. AmeriCorps*VISTA members must be at least 18 years of age. AmeriCorps*NCCC members must be 18-24 years in age and willing to live in a dormitory setting. All national service program members must be a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident alien.

Qualified individuals with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds are strongly encouraged to apply. AmeriCorps programs in West Virginia provide reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals and continuously strive to conduct activities in fully accessible settings.

Benefits of Serving in AmeriCorps

Full-time AmeriCorps*State, *National,*VISTA and *NCCC members receive a modest living allowance and an education award (after completion of their term of service) to pay toward higher education or to repay qualified student loans. Full-time members are also eligible to receive health insurance and child care subsidy. VISTAs have the option to receive a post-service stipend as a substitution to the education award.



Approximately 10-20 percent of an AmeriCorps member's hours are spent in training. AmeriCorps members are trained to perform specific service tasks and may be trained in other areas that include leading groups, coordinating volunteers, time management, and preparing for a career.

Members also benefit from career connections, marketable skills, and the chance to make a real difference in people's lives.



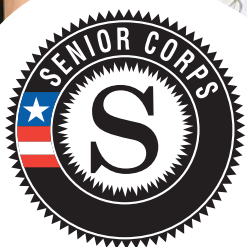
Time Commitment

Full-time AmeriCorps*State and *National members complete 1,700 hours of service in about one year, usually starting in August, September, or October. Less than full-time opportunities are also available. AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve in a full-time position for one year.



Locations

AmeriCorps*State, *National, *VISTA and *NCCC opportunities exist in communities throughout West Virginia and the nation. To learn more about current AmeriCorps*State opportunities and locations, visit www.volunteerwv.org. To learn more about *National, *VISTA and *NCCC opportunities, visit www.americorps.gov or contact the CNCS state office at wv@cns.gov to learn more about local *VISTA projects in West Virginia.



What is Senior Corps?

Senior Corps connects individuals aged 55 and over with the people and organizations that need them most. Senior Corps members become mentors, coaches or companions to people in need, or contribute their job skills and expertise to community projects and organizations. Senior Corps grants provide funding to three programs: Foster Grandparents; Senior Companions; and RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program). All Senior Corps volunteers who serve in one of these programs receive pre-service orientation, training from the organization where they serve, and supplemental accident and liability insurance while on duty.

Senior Corps Programs

- **Foster Grandparents** – Foster Grandparents are volunteers age 55 and over who serve as role models, mentors, and friends to youth. These volunteers serve with local organizations that include faith-based groups, Head Start centers, schools, and other youth facilities. Foster Grandparents help children learn to read, provide one-on-one tutoring, and guide youth at a critical time in their lives.



Foster Grandparents serve up to 40 hours per week, with some qualified volunteers earning a tax-free, hourly stipend. Foster Grandparents receive pre-service orientation, training from the organization where they serve, and supplemental accident and liability insurance while on duty.

- ▶ **Senior Companions** – Senior Companions are volunteers age 55 and over who help adults in their community who have difficulty with the simple tasks of day-to-day living. These volunteers serve as companions that help run errands, provide families and professional caregivers a much-needed break from time to time, and ultimately help preserve an individual's independence.

Senior Companions serve up to 40 hours per week, with some qualified volunteers earning a tax-free, hourly stipend.

- ▶ **RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program)** – RSVP volunteers are age 55 and over who help tackle tough issues in their communities. These volunteers choose how and where they want to serve and the amount of time they would like to give. Unlike Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions, RSVP volunteers do not receive an hourly stipend.

Medical Assistance (MA)

Individuals with disabilities may need additional medical assistance (MA) to cover high prescription drug costs and special health expenses, such as personal care assistance, even if they have other health coverage. Persons on SSI can receive MA at no cost.

Food Support/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The living allowance does not affect eligibility for the federal food support program SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps).

SSI and SSDI Benefits – the HEART Act

On June 17, 2008, President Bush signed into law H.R. 6081, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2008 (the HEART Act), making AmeriCorps more accessible to people with disabilities.

SSI

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program that provides a monthly cash benefit to low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or who have a disability. In the past, receiving an AmeriCorps living allowance could disqualify an individual from eligibility. The new law directs the Social Security Administration to disregard an individual's receipt of AmeriCorps benefits for the purposes of SSI eligibility. The AmeriCorps living allowance, health insurance, and child care subsidy are not counted as earned income for SSI. Senior Corps stipends and cost reimbursements are also excluded from determining income eligibility toward public assistance, including SSI.

SSDI

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a federal program that provides money to individuals with disabilities based on their payments into the insurance program. There are separate laws and regulations for SSI and SSDI eligibility and the HEART Act moved through Congress too quickly to include SSDI. The AmeriCorps*State and *National living allowance **is counted** as earned income for SSDI. However, the AmeriCorps*VISTA living allowance and Senior Corps stipends **are excluded** from determining income eligibility for public assistance, including SSDI. We hope that Congress will extend the AmeriCorps*State and *National exclusion to SSDI in the future.



Other Benefit Programs

For more information about specific benefit programs for persons with disabilities or information about disability programs in your local area, please contact one of the following organizations.



- West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services
(800) 642-8207
www.wvdrs.org
- West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council
(304) 558-0416
www.ddc.wv.gov
- West Virginia Center for Excellence in Disabilities
(888) 829-9426
www.cedwvu.org

Waiving the Living Allowance or Daily Stipend

In some situations, if a living allowance or daily stipend is paid, a member or volunteer may waive all or part of the allowance or stipend if he or she believes his or her public assistance may be lost or decreased because of it. A member or volunteer who has waived the allowance or stipend may revoke the waiver at any time and may begin receiving the allowance or stipend prospective to the revocation date. The member or volunteer may not receive any portion of the living allowance or daily stipend accrued during the waiver period. Members or volunteers should contact their program representative for more information about this option.

Photos provided courtesy of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, and the Utah Conservation Corps.

About Volunteer West Virginia

Volunteer West Virginia is the state's Commission for National and Community Service and strives to assist AmeriCorps members and community partners to meet critical needs throughout the state. Volunteer West Virginia administers funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service to AmeriCorps*State programs throughout West Virginia. Since its creation in 1994, Volunteer West Virginia has helped mobilize more than 10,000 AmeriCorps members who have addressed community needs in the areas of education, healthy futures, veterans and military families, economic opportunity, clean energy and the environment.

Volunteer West Virginia believes that all individuals who are qualified and have a desire to serve the community should have the opportunity to do so. Volunteer West Virginia staff work with programs, disability organizations, colleges and universities, and the larger disability community to spread the word about AmeriCorps and ensure that West Virginia's programs are as inclusive as possible.

Learn More

For more information about AmeriCorps*State opportunities in West Virginia, please visit **www.volunteerwv.org** or call **(800) WV-HELPS**. For more information about AmeriCorps*VISTA and Senior Corps programs in West Virginia, please contact the CNCS state office at wv@cns.gov or by calling **(304) 347-5246**. For information about other national service opportunities throughout the United States, please visit **www.nationalservice.gov**.

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(304) 558-0111 or (800) WV-HELPS
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