



AmeriCorps & the Collective Power of Nonprofit Organizations

SPOTLIGHT ON FLINT, MICHIGAN



Poverty. Blight. Unemployment. And most recently, lead in the water.

This is the narrative that much of the world sees about Flint, Michigan. But there's a much more positive – often untold – story in Flint. A story of neighbors helping neighbors, of people of all backgrounds serving their community, and of alignment between the city, nonprofit partners, funding partners, schools, and residents to champion service as a strategy to reinvent the community. National service programs, including AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, are integral to that story.

Flint has long benefited from the contributions of AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members. But in 2011, leaders from Flint's nonprofit community established the Flint National Service Accelerator based on a growing sense that with more coordination, training and community support, both the number and the impact of these hardworking service members could be much greater. The Accelerator provides the capacity-building and technical assistance that local nonprofits need to successfully apply for, recruit, and train service members through three streams of service: AmeriCorps State and National; Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA); and National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). The Accelerator also coordinates with three Senior Corps programs: Senior Companions, Foster Grandparents and RSVP. Once service members are placed with an organization in the community, the Accelerator provides monthly professional development, training, days of service, leadership opportunities and other supports to make sure each has a successful service experience.

Through the Accelerator, nonprofit organizations are coordinating to more effectively address community needs. National service members are tutoring and mentoring students, developing the city's parks, creating community safety groups, and eliminating blight. And in 2016 the Accelerator supported AmeriCorps NCCC teams who came to Flint to assist in responding to the city's drinking water crisis. In partnership with the local American Red Cross, these service members delivered water, filters, and testing kits door-to-door as well as disseminated information and education on water health and safety measures. AmeriCorps members continue to help with recovery efforts, serving in Flint schools to support students' and families' long-term needs, supporting neighborhoods with resident outreach, and being a resource to nonprofits through the newly created Flint Recovery Corps.



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- Renee Harvey -

The Accelerator is also expanding the national service presence in Flint, creating new programs and positions to address new issues. It started in 2011 with 25 members and 1 Flint-based AmeriCorps program, and now has nearly 200 AmeriCorps members and 6 Flint-based AmeriCorps programs that are meeting emerging needs in education, opioid abuse prevention, safety, and more. The Accelerator recruits local candidates to fill new positions, building the talent pipeline within the community as service members stay for work or school.

Not only are Accelerator programs benefitting the community, they're positively impacting the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members who serve. AmeriCorps member Renee Harvey says that through her experience, her belief in community was reaffirmed: "I learned I could make a difference. And by getting involved and working with community groups, we could give each other hope."

The Flint national service accelerator model is rewriting the narrative to be about assets, not deficits, and is attracting national attention for its innovative approach—including garnering private investment of more than \$500,000 from the Flint National Service fund and other supports to supplement the government funding for service. According to Jenny McArdle, the Chief Service Officer of Flint, "The service provided by engaged citizens is the only way the city can become the place we've all envisioned it being, and the experiences that shape the members and volunteers themselves will create the next generation of civic-minded leaders who will determine our future narrative."

