



## Tips for Handling Tough Questions

(Updated June 20, 2024)

Whether in a district meeting with a member of Congress and their staff, or during a site visit, you may sometimes receive questions that you do not know how to answer. To help you prepare, below you will find strategies for answering tough questions and sample answers to some common and unique tough questions.

### Strategies for Answering Tough Questions

When asked those dreaded questions, utilize one of these strategies:

- **CONSTRUCT** your response with key messages:
  - Response should include an emphasis on the impact AmeriCorps programs have on Americans across the country or in their communities, ideally including specific examples/statistics.
  - Response should include a mention of a program in the legislator's city/district or a program that is a priority for them to illustrate your point.
- **PIVOT away** from the topic and **to** messaging related to the impact of AmeriCorps:
  - "While I can't speak to [X], what I can tell you is [Y]."
- **Nominally answer with a BRIDGE** back to your message:
  - "[Very short answer to question], and in addition I'd like to note that..."
- **Kindly ACKNOWLEDGE feedback** without engaging on the matter:
  - "Thank you for sharing your perspective here. This is under consideration, and I'll be sure to share your thoughts with the team working on it."

### Common Tough Questions

The following questions can be answered with the talking points above, and you should tailor them to your audience and community. However, we have included some suggested answers below to get you started.

#### ***How can AmeriCorps members know what's best for the communities they serve if they aren't from there?***

- *AmeriCorps members become embedded in communities, working for years with local organizations and making long-lasting tangible contributions based on a strong understanding of local needs.*
- *[Detail how AmeriCorps members have become integral parts of your community, especially if they have stayed in the community after their service.]*
- *[Equally as important, highlight how your program has recruited AmeriCorps members from the community.]*

#### ***Why should the federal government spend money on AmeriCorps? Wouldn't it be more effective to fund programs directly?***

- *With AmeriCorps, the federal government shares costs with the organizations its members assist. Every federal investment in AmeriCorps requires matching funds from organizational*

partners. This shared investment expands the reach of its programs and creates on-the-ground community impact.

- Through this public-private partnership, every \$1 Congress invests in AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors returns more than \$17 in benefits to communities.

### **Why is funding AmeriCorps critical?**

- In communities across the country – urban and rural – AmeriCorps members of all backgrounds are providing on-the-ground support to critical community programs in schools, food banks, homeless shelters, health centers, youth organizations, veterans' facilities, and other nonprofit and faith-based organizations.
- AmeriCorps provides essential funds and people power for nonprofits in your community, such as [insert your organization] and [insert other notable organizations doing local work].
- Through this public-private partnership, every \$1 Congress invests in AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors returns more than \$17 in benefits to communities.

### **Unique Tough Questions**

Although most of the tough questions that you will come across can be answered with the key messages above, the questions below require some specificity.

### ***Is this agency stewarding federal dollars properly? Why should we give money to an agency that has not had a clean audit?***

- AmeriCorps by design was established as administratively lean. This, at times, has resulted in underinvestment in core business operations, with administrative funding not keeping pace with programmatic requirements and resulting in years of deferred investments in operations and infrastructure.
- With sufficient funding, the agency will be able to continue critical programs in communities around the country and make seriously needed improvements to operations and infrastructure.

### ***Are AmeriCorps programs struggling to fill their positions?***

- During the pandemic, AmeriCorps applications and confirmations declined. But this trend is reversing, and many programs are back on the path to pre-pandemic recruitment outcomes.
- Voices for National Service surveyed dozens of AmeriCorps programs in Sept 2021, and found that on average, applications had increased 36% in 2023 and confirmation increased by 21%.
- Recruitment health is improving across the board. Our survey found small programs (<1,000 applications) experienced an average increase of 36% compared to large organizations who had a 37% increase in applications.
- National service is increasingly being viewed as an opportunity to make an impact, gain hands-on experience and skill development, and significantly reduce the cost of college.
- AmeriCorps provides opportunities for young people to develop skills and access a college education. Ultimately, it's not only good for communities in need, but it also benefits participants and the American workforce as a whole.