



***Guidebook for  
Communicating  
AmeriCorps' Impact to  
Elected Officials***

***April 2026***

For more information, visit <https://voicesforservice.org> or  
contact [info@voicesforservice.org](mailto:info@voicesforservice.org).

# Introduction

AmeriCorps is a federally funded program, and congressional support is essential to the communities across the nation that rely on it for critical services and resources. As an organization working on the front lines of your community, you play an important role in communicating the value of AmeriCorps and reinforcing its local impact.

Elected officials want and need to hear from their constituents – throughout the year, but particularly when funding decisions are being made. AmeriCorps funding is decided annually, and it is not guaranteed. Your input as a community leader is both critical and valued by lawmakers, and engaging in a non-political, educational way about AmeriCorps' work **is an allowable activity**.

This guidebook provides tools for your organization to confidently communicate with public officials about AmeriCorps' impact on your community and beyond. While some of the talking points and suggestions are written with a federal audience in mind, these strategies can also be used with state and local officials.

The chapters that follow support you at each stage of engagement. Early chapters focus on preparing your message and initiating contact with public officials through meetings, site visits, and writing letters to the editor and op-eds. Later chapters provide guidance on how to build on those initial interactions by coordinating your outreach, aligning with current policy priorities, and sustaining relationships over time.

If you need additional guidance with any of the information or resources in this guidebook, reach out to Voices for National Service for assistance at [info@voicesforservice.org](mailto:info@voicesforservice.org).

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# Part I: Initiating Engagement with Public Officials

The following chapters provide practical tools and guidance to help you begin engaging with public officials about the impact of AmeriCorps in your community. From developing key messages to requesting meetings, hosting site visits, and leveraging local media, these tactics are designed to help you confidently introduce your work and build initial relationships with policymakers.

## Chapter 1: Key Messages

*Before a meeting, site visit, interview, or other engagement, it is important to build in time to prepare. Think about who you will be speaking with and what questions they may ask. Make sure that you are clear on your goals and the key messages you want to communicate about AmeriCorps and your organization.*

*This chapter provides guidance to frame your messages to policymakers. The following high-level talking points should be strengthened with specific details about your organization and its local impact.*

### Lead Message: AmeriCorps is a Model of Efficient and Effective Government

*Use this framing when engaging elected officials to clearly convey the core case for AmeriCorps – its impact, efficiency, and bipartisan value. The supporting messages below provide additional detail and can be used to reinforce or tailor your conversation.*

For the last three decades, AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers have responded to our country's most immediate and critical needs. They provide the "people power" that local nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations rely on to deliver services and make a difference in local communities.

Each year, 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors serve in rural and urban communities across all 50 states, supporting disaster response, education, public health, veterans' services, fighting the opioid epidemic, and much more.

While serving, AmeriCorps members gain in-demand job skills and complete their service with increased employability and pathways to higher education, preparing a cohort of Americans to succeed in the workforce. AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers experience meaningful benefits, including reduced isolation and increased community connection.

AmeriCorps delivers measurable results through a cost-effective, public-private partnership model that has earned strong bipartisan support. Supporting AmeriCorps is an investment in workforce development, community resilience, responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and American values.

## Supporting Messages

- **17:1 Return on Investment:** AmeriCorps is a unique example of federal government efficiency and tax dollar stewardship. Economists have found that, for every federal dollar invested, AmeriCorps generates \$17 in economic value through private matching funds and the services its members provide.
- **Financial Accountability & Private Sector Engagement:** As a public-private partnership, AmeriCorps grantees must secure matching funds from the private sector, foundations, nonprofits, and/or state and local governments.
- **Strengthening Workforce Readiness:** As the economy evolves and AI reshapes entry-level work, AmeriCorps provides a critical pathway for individuals to gain the skills and experience needed to succeed. AmeriCorps:
  - Develops durable, human-centered skills – such as teamwork, communication, and adaptability – that employers increasingly value and automation cannot replace.
  - Provides hands-on experience in high-demand fields like education, public safety, disaster response, and healthcare.
  - Prepares participants for private-sector careers with practical, mission-driven experience.
  - Connects individuals – especially those early in their careers – to pathways for upward mobility.
- **Supporting Local & Faith-Based Solutions:** AmeriCorps ensures services are tailored to community needs by partnering with local nonprofits, businesses, and faith-based organizations, rather than dictated by a one-size-fits-all model from Washington.
- **Bipartisan Governance & Congressional Support:**
  - AmeriCorps has long received strong bipartisan support in Congress, as members of both parties recognize the program’s efficiency, ability to address critical community needs, and significant return on investment.
  - State and local leaders from both sides of the aisle also rely on AmeriCorps as an essential partner in strengthening their community.
- **Strengthening Communities, Reducing Long-Term Costs:** AmeriCorps strengthens communities by addressing the root causes of challenges such as education gaps, housing instability, and disaster preparedness – helping reduce long-term costs and strains on public systems.

## Because of AmeriCorps/Without AmeriCorps Framework

*One of the most effective ways to communicate impact is the “Because of / Without AmeriCorps” framework.*

It can be helpful to answer the questions:

- How does AmeriCorps help your organization deliver impact for the American people?
- How would – or how has – reduced AmeriCorps funding impacted your organization?

By highlighting what you are able to do “Because of AmeriCorps” and what services would be lost “Without AmeriCorps,” you can help lawmakers clearly understand the direct impact in their district or state – and what’s at stake.

Some examples include:

- *Because of AmeriCorps, we were able to provide nearly 300 unhoused individuals with access to services in the first quarter of 2025.*
- *Without AmeriCorps, our tutoring programs would lose over 20 tutors serving more than 500 children in low-income communities – leaving an entire school without the support needed to stay on track in reading.*

## Tailor Your Message to Your Audience

While these messages provide a strong foundation, they are most effective when tailored to your audience. Local relevance is one of the most powerful tools you have when communicating with public officials. Whenever possible:

- Reference programs, partners, or impact in the policymaker’s district or state,
- Use specific data and real examples from your community, and
- Connect your message to issues the lawmaker prioritizes.

## Chapter 2: How to Navigate Tough Questions and Conduct Effective Meetings

*You can help build champions of AmeriCorps by providing accurate and timely information, presenting persuasive arguments, and always remaining courteous and respectful during your meeting. Avoid being argumentative, even if the member of Congress and/or staffer disagree with your perspective. Be patient and listen to what they have to say.*

*Most frequently asked questions can be answered using the key messages and general talking points in Chapter 1, tailored to your audience and community. If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, it is okay to say, “I will follow up with that information, as soon as possible” – just be sure to follow up!*

*However, some tough questions require additional preparation and thoughtful framing. Use these strategies for answering questions that are challenging or difficult.*

## Strategies for Answering Tough Questions

- Construct your response with key messages.
- Pivot to AmeriCorps impact: “While I can’t speak to [X], what I can share is how AmeriCorps is making a difference in [Y].”
- Bridge back to your message: “[Very short answer to question], and I’d also highlight that...”
- Acknowledge without engaging deeply: “Thank you for sharing your perspective. I’ll be sure to pass that along, and I’d be happy to follow up with additional information.”

See Appendix 1 for some commonly asked tough questions and sample responses.

## Chapter 3: Strategies for Directly Engaging Your Elected Officials

*Public officials want to hear from community leaders about local needs and priorities. Inviting them to visit your service site, requesting a district meeting, or attending a town hall are all opportunities to educate them on how your organization is using AmeriCorps members and resources to deliver services their constituents need and to strengthen the communities they represent.*

### Keep in mind the 5 Ws:

- **Who are your federal lawmakers?**
  - Visit Congress.gov and input your zip code to find your members of Congress. Everyone will have two Senators and 1 Representative.
  - If you have multiple service locations or serve folks from across a region, your AmeriCorps program may span multiple congressional districts. You should work to engage all of your members of Congress over time!
- **What should you communicate?**
  - Refer to the key messages in Chapter I for clear, consistent messaging.
  - Emphasize local impact, using concrete examples of your programs.
  - Congressional engagement is most effective with a **clear ask**; every engagement should end with a specific request, such as:
    - Protect the federal investment in AmeriCorps
    - Join the National Service Congressional Caucus
    - Come to a site visit to meet AmeriCorps members
- **When should you engage?**
  - Engagement should be ongoing, not limited to moments of crisis.
  - As a general goal, aim for quarterly touchpoints per year with each key office (see more in Chapter 5).

- A congressional recess is when members of Congress are at home, instead of Washington DC, and may be more able to join local meetings or site visits. You can visit [the Voices for National Service webpage](#) for details on the congressional calendar and upcoming recess dates.
- **Where should engagement take place?**
  - While you may think you need to be in Washington, DC to engage your lawmakers, this is not the case! All members of Congress have district offices and local staff in your community, who may be the best first line of engagement.
  - Check out [these videos](#) from the Voices for National Service website to hear from Brian McNabb, State Director for Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), to hear more about the role of district/state offices and local staff.
- **Why does direct engagement matter?**
  - Federal policy decisions are shaped by the information lawmakers receive – and by the relationships they trust.
  - When you engage consistently and professionally, you position yourself as a resource, not just an advocate.
  - Direct engagement ensures that elected officials:
    - Associate AmeriCorps with real people and real results in their district,
    - Have concrete examples of AmeriCorps impact they can reference, and
    - View your organization as a credible, nonpartisan community partner they can come to with questions in the future.

## Strategy 1: Hosting a Service Site Visit

*Seeing AmeriCorps members in action is compelling and a successful site visit can help you cultivate a relationship with a lawmaker that will benefit your organization and AmeriCorps for the long term.*

*Below are tips for requesting and hosting a successful service site visit with your member of Congress or a senior member of their staff. Refer to Appendix 2 for an invitation template.*

- **Send a formal invitation:** Even if you speak in person with a member of Congress or their staff about visiting your program, it's important to follow up with a formal invitation.
  - Call the lawmaker's office and ask for the scheduler's name, email address, and their preferred method for receiving invitations for events in the state/district.
  - Copy any policy staff you already know on your email to the scheduler.
  - If a board member or other community partner who knows your program well has a relationship with the legislator, ask for their help elevating your invitation. They could co-sign your letter or make a follow-up phone call or email.
- **Be flexible in suggesting potential dates/times for a site visit:** Scheduling can be difficult. Offer several options of days/times that your program could welcome the lawmaker. Your flexibility, to the extent possible, will improve the likelihood of successfully scheduling a visit.

- **Be sure to follow up on pending invitations:** Members of Congress receive far more requests for their time than they can reasonably fulfill, and sometimes invitations get lost. While you should be patient with the scheduler, follow up if you have not received a response to a pending invitation after a week or more.
- **If the lawmaker is not available on any upcoming date,** you should consider asking the State or District Director to visit your program. The State and District Directors are senior members of the lawmaker's staff and engaging them can pave the way for a future opportunity with the member of Congress.
- **Choose the right service location:** Members of Congress will be most interested in and willing to visit an AmeriCorps service site located within their congressional district or in the region they serve.
  - If you have multiple service locations, make sure the location is also a strong example of your program's service model.
  - If your program serves inside a school, health center, or any facility managed by another entity, make sure they know that you plan to invite an elected official to see your program. They may want to join the visit and help validate the critical impact your AmeriCorps members have on their operations.
- **Invite external validators to participate in the site visit:** Elected officials will want to know how the investment in AmeriCorps impacts the local community. It always helps to have external validators – such as private sector funders, board members, community partners, or school district representatives – join the visit to speak in support of AmeriCorps and your impact in their community.
- **Confirm whether the visit will be open or closed to press:** If the elected official wishes to have the event open to the press, a media advisory will have to be issued, in coordination with their office. If your AmeriCorps members serve inside another organization, your host may have local press contacts and relationships that they can involve. With permission from the lawmaker's communications office, you may wish to amplify the event through a joint press release posted across your channels (website, social media, newsletter, etc.) and sent to the media.
- **Be careful not to engage in political campaign activity:** As nonpartisan organizations that receive federal funds, AmeriCorps programs should only invite currently serving government officials to visit their programs, not candidates for political office. Visits may not occur in connection with any political campaign activities.
- **Provide briefing materials in advance of the visit:** Elected officials will almost always receive a briefing memo from their staff in advance of any event or appearance. If you proactively provide the office with your own briefing memo several days in advance of the scheduled visit, you will save them time and ensure that up-to-date detail on your program is presented to the

lawmaker prior to the visit. Voices can assist in providing relevant policy updates to include in a briefing memo.

- **Share the visit on social media:** Make sure to take pictures of the elected official visiting your AmeriCorps program and interacting with AmeriCorps members, and – with their office’s permission – tag the elected official, @AmeriCorps, @AmeriCorpsSr, and @Voices4Service when posting online.
- **Thank the elected official for visiting:** A simple thank you note can go a long way. At a minimum, follow-up with any staff in the meeting via email, thank them for taking the time to visit, and provide any materials that were discussed or requested during the visit. See Chapter 7 for more recommendations on following up after engagement.

## Strategy 2: Requesting a District Meeting with a Member of Congress

*A one-on-one meeting will carry more weight than signing a petition, sending a letter or email, or making a phone call, and there are many advantages to holding your meeting in the local office, rather than the D.C. office. Scheduling a meeting with the district/state office can be easier and allows you to establish a local relationship that can be deepened over time.*

*Below are tips for requesting and leading a successful in-district meeting with your member of Congress or a senior member of their staff. Refer to Appendix 3 for a template meeting request.*

- **Selecting a date for your in-district congressional office meeting:** When requesting a meeting, try to contact the local office at least two weeks before your preferred meeting date. We recommend offering several days or a span of time when you would be available to meet.
  - If it is important that you meet with the lawmaker, ask for an appointment during a congressional recess or on a Monday morning or Friday, when the legislator is most likely to be home.
  - If you cannot secure a meeting with the lawmaker, meeting with their District or State Director – both senior members of the congressional office staff – can still be extremely valuable.
- **Scheduling a one-on-one meeting with your local congressional office:**
  - Call the lawmaker’s office and ask for the district/state scheduler’s name, email address, and their preferred method for receiving meeting invitations.
  - Draft an email message that includes a general description of your organization, the purpose of the meeting, who will be in attendance (note any constituents), and dates of availability. Be prepared to follow up on your meeting request if you do not receive a response after a week or more.
- **Decide who should attend the meeting to help demonstrate the breadth of support for AmeriCorps in your area:** District office meetings about AmeriCorps funding are strongest when the congressional office can hear multiple perspectives about the local benefits of

AmeriCorps. Consider inviting another AmeriCorps programs, service partners, board members, AmeriCorps alumni, or other local validators to participate in your meeting.

- If appropriate, ask your meeting participants to show clear co-branding with AmeriCorps or AmeriCorps Seniors – for example, wear AmeriCorps branded clothing or a lapel pin to the appointment, or use an AmeriCorps virtual background.
  - It is best not to invite the press or the general public, as members of Congress and staff are more inclined to speak freely and share information during private meetings.
- **Prepare for your meeting:**
    - Review Voices for National Service’s talking points in Chapter 1 to prepare for the meeting.
    - Congressional staff often refer to materials given to them in meetings. Create a folder with relevant materials to share with the member or congressional staff at the start of the meeting, including:
      - Information on your organization, including impact stats and stories
      - Information on AmeriCorps in your state, city, or congressional district from the AmeriCorps Service Map ([americorps.gov](http://americorps.gov))
      - [National Service Congressional Caucus one-pager](#)
      - Local news articles, letters to the editor, or op-eds about AmeriCorps
- **Arrive early:** Many district offices are located in government buildings, where you must pass through security at the entrance. Give yourself enough travel time so you are not late for your meeting.
- **Be prepared with a meeting agenda:** While the meeting structure may vary based on whether the member of Congress is present or how much time has been allotted for the meeting, it is recommended to follow this meeting flow:
    - Open by thanking the office for their time and by distributing meeting materials, including any leave-behind documents.
    - Introduce the group. Each participant should *briefly* share their relationship with AmeriCorps and how AmeriCorps is helping to solve pressing local needs.
    - Highlight the connection between AmeriCorps funding and the impact your program has in the lawmaker’s community.
      - This is a good time to use the “Because of AmeriCorps” and “Without AmeriCorps” framework discussed in Chapter 1, along with any other key messages.
      - Use relevant data and statistics to strengthen messaging.
    - Close the meeting with three “asks”:
      - Protect the federal investment in AmeriCorps
      - Join the [National Service Congressional Caucus](#), if not already a member
      - Invite the lawmaker and their staff to a site visit at your program.

- At the end of the meeting, ask the staff or lawmaker to take a photo with you, so you can share your appreciation on social media. Don't forget to tag @AmeriCorps, @AmeriCorpsSr, and @Voices4Service in your post.
- **Listen and gather information:** It is important to take detailed notes and flag any commitments that are made. Remember to ask members of Congress and their staff how you can help ensure their support. Note any follow-up you've promised to send.
- **Follow Up:** After the meeting, be sure to get the staffer's business card or email address. Most offices have staff business cards located at the front desk. Always send a follow-up email in which you should thank the member of Congress and/or staffer for taking the time to meet with you, summarize the meeting - including any specific asks that were made by you or commitments made by their office - answer any questions that were left unanswered, and link to any materials that were requested. See Chapter 7 for more recommendations on following up after engagement.
- **Tips for Virtual Meetings:** Scheduling and preparing for virtual meetings are very similar to the process for face-to-face meetings. Below are additional tips for a virtual environment:
  - When speaking with the scheduler, ask if their congressional office has a preferred virtual platform (Zoom, Teams, etc.) and if the office would prefer to host the meeting or receive an invitation from you.
  - Many people can attend a virtual meeting but limit the speaking roles to four people or fewer. If you are planning to have more than four people join the call, check in with the congressional office to see if they are okay with a larger call and clarify that only four people will have speaking roles.
  - The member of Congress may be able to join only a portion of your meeting, depending on their schedule. It is normal for members to leave a meeting early or join partway through. Be flexible and mindful of time.
  - Prepare PDF versions of your leave-behind materials and email them to staff on the call. Do not rely on the chat feature of the platform to share these resources.
  - Be mindful that staff may keep their video turned off during virtual meetings.

### Strategy 3: Participating in a Town Hall or Other Local Events

*If you are unable to schedule a meeting or host your own service site visit, consider going to an event that the lawmaker is hosting, or one at which they are scheduled to appear. Take whatever opportunity might present itself to make a short introduction so they know you are present and share your AmeriCorps elevator pitch.*

### Strategy 4: Writing Letters to Members of Congress

*Your AmeriCorps program has many stakeholders: board members, service partners, philanthropic supporters, the Chamber of Commerce, mayor and city council members, service beneficiaries, alumni,*

*and more. These respected members of your community can be policy influencers, and, if activated, can validate the importance of your work and AmeriCorps.*

*A well-crafted letter from your executive leadership or any of these local stakeholders and champions can be an effective tool to communicate AmeriCorps' unique value to your community and the importance of federal funding.*

*Below are tips for writing and sending a letter to your members of Congress. Refer to Appendix 4 for both a template and a sample letter.*

- Discuss whose letterhead you want to use - for example, would it better to use the letterhead for your program or one of your board members' organizations? Choose the letterhead that will attract the most attention from your lawmakers.
- It is recommended to send the letter to the senators and all representatives whose congressional districts your program serves. If you do this, be sure to address the letter to all recipients.
- Letters do not require ink or e-signatures. You can simply add the name, title, and organization for each signatory after the closing.
- When the letter is ready to submit – email copies to the lawmaker's Chief of Staff and their State/District Director AND send a copy by physical mail to the Washington DC office. You can call the congressional office to ask for those staffers' names and email addresses. Note that regular mail can be very delayed getting to congressional offices, so make sure to also email a copy.

## Chapter 4: Using Media Strategies to Engage Elected Officials

*Lawmakers and their staff closely monitor constituent interests and concerns via local and regional media outlets, making them an effective avenue for reaching federal, state, and local leaders.*

### Strategy 1: Writing a Letter to the Editor

*Letters to the Editor (LTE) are widely read not only by members of Congress and their staff, but also the general public, newspaper editors and reporters, and other opinion leaders. An LTE that speaks to a broader audience, and underscores AmeriCorps' vital importance to the local community, is a great way to get your legislator's attention and garner more public support.*

*Below are tips for writing and submitting a Letter to the Editor. Refer to Appendix 5 for both a template and sample LTEs.*

- **Respond to recent news:** Often, LTEs respond to a specific article that recently ran in the paper, so monitor any news regarding appropriations, AmeriCorps, local programs, and/or

community service more generally for an opportunity to respond. If you're responding to an article, the faster you can submit your LTE the greater likelihood it will be accepted. If there isn't a specific article to respond to, you can still submit an LTE highlighting AmeriCorps and its impact in your community.

- **Stay local:** Consider submitting to a smaller local paper, not just the nearest big city paper. You'll have a better chance of getting published and still get noticed by your members of Congress.
- **Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting:** Stay focused on one (or, at the most, two) main point(s) – in this case, the impact AmeriCorps has in local communities and/or the need for AmeriCorps funding. Include interesting facts, relevant personal experience, and any local connections to the issue. Wrap your letter up by explaining what you think needs to happen and making a call to action. If you are trying to influence a legislator(s), refer to them by name.
- **Stick to word limits:** Papers have a word limit, and you must stick to it. Look up the word limit for your intended publication (google the name of the publication and "letter to the editor submission") prior to drafting. Be clear and concise – many only allow about 150 words.
- **Submitting your LTE:** You can find the email address for submitting your LTE on the newspaper's website. Paste your letter into the body of your email – do NOT include it as an attachment.
  - Many newspapers require that letter writers submit contact information with their letter. Phone numbers won't be published. This is just to verify your identity.
- **[Keep Voices for National Service posted](#):** Assistance is available for editing your LTE and providing advice on placement, if needed. Please also let Voices know once your LTE is published, so we can pass it along to your members of Congress and amplify it on our social media channels.

## Strategy 2: Writing an Op-Ed

*Opinion pieces can play a crucial role in highlighting AmeriCorps' significance to the work of local organizations, its impact on local communities, and why AmeriCorps should be protected.*

*Below are tips for writing and submitting an op-ed about AmeriCorps. Refer to Appendix 5 for a template and sample op-eds.*

- **Make sure it communicates an opinion:** The purpose of an op-ed is to offer an opinion on a topic that is timely and unique. Your chances of getting your op-ed published are much stronger if you can connect your submission to the current news cycle and make it relevant to local readers.

- **Grab the reader’s attention at the top:** From the first line, your op-ed should compel people to keep reading and not lose their attention to another headline. Try to avoid an opening that is just background information. Instead, write an opening that says something new or clever.
- **Length.** Op-eds are typically 500–750 words in length, and it helps to know the word guidelines before you start drafting. You can google the name of the paper and “submitting an op-ed” to find specific instructions for that paper.
- **Write fast, edit deliberately:** You should be able to communicate what you are trying to say in one sentence (journalists call this the “budget line”). Build out your draft or outline from there. As you write your thoughts down on paper, connect them back to that one line.
- **Keep it simple:** The goal of an op-ed is to persuade. To persuade someone, they must understand your message. When you are trying to articulate your opinion, write how you speak. In most cases, short, simple sentences are best. While writing with lofty vocabulary and jargon may impress experts, it can lose the attention of a typical reader. Let verbs be verbs and try to avoid adverbs, jargon, and acronyms. It is helpful to read your draft out loud once it is complete, as areas of improvement will become clearer.
- **Emotional connection:** To persuade your intended audience, your writing must inspire an emotional connection in the reader. You want the reader to care about your cause. If your piece does not make someone think about your issue, it’s not going to bring them to your side.
- **Use examples:** Readers often do not remember facts or statistics, but they will remember stories. People desire emotion and connection. They are more sympathetic motivators than any organization. Real-life examples can help humanize a complex topic. Anecdotes also provide opportunities to include and activate local people who have benefited from AmeriCorps who may be interested in standing up for the program.
- **Conclusion.** It often helps to end with a call to action, such as urging your members of Congress to support AmeriCorps. Refer to the member(s) by name, if you’re submitting to a local paper (versus a national outlet).
- **Getting placed:** Once you have a strong piece, the next step is pitching it.
  - Choose a publication that reaches your target audience. For most AmeriCorps partners, this will be a local, community, or regional paper.
  - To find submission instructions, search the outlet’s website (or google the name of the paper and “submitting an op-ed.”) You will typically find a general submissions email address or an online form. If possible, identify the opinion page editor and address them directly.

- Include a short cover note (2-3 sentences) summarizing your main point and why it matters now. Lead with a clear, compelling “one sentence” that captures your argument. Let the outlet know that you are only submitting the op-ed to their paper.
- Paste the full op-ed text into the body of the email (do not attach it), and include your name, title and contact information.
- It can also be helpful to have an eye-catching subject line, as editors receive many submissions each day.
- Most papers need three days to get back to you (and, unfortunately, many do not respond if they decide not to publish your piece).
- Before you move on to another outlet, email again (and try to call) to check on the status of your piece.
- If you have gotten a rejection or not heard back after your first follow-up, you can move on to another paper.
- **If your piece is accepted:** Your op-ed may receive a few tweaks, and editors often change headlines. Once the piece has been published, do not forget to use the publication’s link when sharing it across your social channels, in newsletters, and in other owned stakeholder email distributions. Extra amplification can go a long way toward getting your message in front of – and reinforcing it with – the right audience.
  - [Email your published piece to Voices](#) so we can amplify across our social channels.
- **Op-ed alternatives:** If you are struggling to place a piece, don’t give up! It is still impactful to publish the piece using your own channels, such as a blog post on your website, or through a post on a site that is used for communicating ideas and policy positions, like Medium or LinkedIn. Posting your piece on more than one channel can help amplify your organization’s impact and story.

## Part II: From Initial Engagement to Long-Term Relationships

*Once you have initiated contact with a public official – whether through meetings, a site visit, letters, or media outreach – the next step is to build and sustain that relationship over time. Effective engagement is not a one-time interaction; it is an ongoing, disciplined effort to build trust, provide value, and position your organization as a reliable resource for policymakers.*

*The following sections offer practical guidance on coordinating your outreach, aligning with current policy priorities, and maintaining consistent engagement with congressional offices.*

## Chapter 5: Building a Coordinated Strategy Over Time

*Initial outreach - such as requesting a meeting or hosting a site visit - is an important first step. However, lasting impact requires a coordinated, sustained approach that builds relationships, reinforces messages, and aligns engagement with key policy moments.*

### Set Clear Goals

Before engaging with a public official, identify what you hope to achieve. Goals may include:

- Educating the office about AmeriCorps' local impact
- Securing support for AmeriCorps funding
- Encouraging participation in the National Service Congressional Caucus
- Building a long-term champion for national service

### Identify and Prioritize Your Audience

Not all policymakers require the same approach. Consider tailoring your engagement based on their level of familiarity and support:

- Champions: Already supportive; focus on deepening engagement and increasing visibility
- Persuadable Offices: Open to learning more; prioritize education and local impact
- Less Familiar Offices: Focus on introductory engagement and clear, concise messaging

### Sequence Your Engagement

Elected official engagement is most effective when it builds over time. Consider the following progression:

1. Initial outreach (email, meeting request, or event invitation)
2. Introductory meeting or site visit
3. Follow-up communication reinforcing key messages
4. Ongoing engagement tied to local updates or policy developments

### Coordinate with Partners

Where possible, align your outreach with other AmeriCorps programs, state commissions, and national partners. Coordinated engagement helps reinforce consistent messaging and demonstrate broad community support.

### Align with the Congressional Calendar

Timing matters. Engagement is often most effective during key periods such as congressional recesses, appropriations activity, AmeriCorps Week, or major legislative developments. Planning ahead

can help ensure your outreach is timely and relevant. Aim for multiple touchpoints throughout the year – we recommend at least quarterly outreach.

## Track All Engagement

Tracking engagement over time allows you to refer to past meetings, identify patterns, avoid repeating information, and build on prior conversations. If possible, you should maintain a spreadsheet or simple tracking system for your organization that includes:

- Date of interactions
- Who attended
- Key issues discussed
- Specific “asks” made
- Commitments made by the office
- Follow-up actions required

Please share updates with [Voices for National Service](#) to ensure alignment and support.

## Chapter 6: Aligning Your Ask with the Policy Moment

*While this guidebook provides general engagement principles, specific policy requests (or “asks”) may evolve over time based on the federal landscape. It is important to know what is happening in Congress to tailor your outreach accordingly.*

To ensure your outreach is timely and aligned:

- [Check with Voices for National Service](#) prior to key engagements to confirm current priorities, messaging, and specific asks.
- Avoid making outdated or inconsistent requests that could create confusion for congressional offices.
- Recognize that asks may differ depending on the timing (e.g., appropriations process, authorizing legislation, or emerging policy proposals). Voices for National Service can provide guidance on the field’s specific funding request and timing.
  - Early in the fiscal year: prioritize education and awareness, priming members for the appropriations process.
  - When Congress is writing appropriations bills: clearly ask lawmakers to support the highest possible funding level for AmeriCorps.
  - If cuts are proposed: utilize “Without AmeriCorps” framing to explain potential local consequences.

## General Tips for Making an Effective Ask

- Be clear and concise

- Connect your request to local impact (e.g., “Because of AmeriCorps...” / “Without AmeriCorps...”)
- Reinforce AmeriCorps’ bipartisan value and cost-effectiveness

Voices for National Service can provide the most up-to-date guidance to ensure your engagement is coordinated and effective.

## Connect AmeriCorps to Policymaker Priorities

Before meeting with a lawmaker, research their priorities. Note that these may change over time based on what’s happening in the news or in Congress, or based on your past engagements. Look for anything relevant to national service in committee assignments, public statements, or press releases.

Align your message to the member’s priorities. For example:

- If the member of Congress prioritizes workforce development, emphasize how AmeriCorps builds durable, human-centered skills.
- If they focus on disaster response, highlight how AmeriCorps members support emergency preparedness or specific examples of disaster response in your community.
- If they prioritize fiscal responsibility, reinforce the \$17 return on investment and required matching funds.

## Chapter 7: Follow-Up and Long-Term Relationship Building

*Building a strong relationship with a congressional office requires consistent, thoughtful follow-up over time. A single interaction is rarely sufficient to establish lasting support.*

*It is very normal and important for the bulk of your follow-up to be with staff, rather than with the member of Congress directly. Staff carry a lot of weight in keeping policy issues front and center for the member and are excellent contacts for your organization. Strong staff relationships often lead to stronger member engagement.*

- **Immediate Follow-Up:** Within 24-48 hours of any meeting or site visit, you should:
  - Send a thank-you email to the staffer(s) or member of Congress,
  - Reiterate key points discussed and any specific requests made, and
  - Provide any additional materials or information requested.
- **Provide Ongoing Value:** Reach out during key policy moments or share periodic updates with congressional staff. Throughout the year, consider sending:
  - Updates on program milestones
  - New local impact data
  - Media coverage (Letters to the Editor, op-eds, or press mentions)
  - Invitations to community events, service projects/Days of Service events, or site visits
  - Stories that highlight constituent benefit, including alumni success stories

- Notes of thanks for supportive actions the lawmaker takes for AmeriCorps (e.g. signing appropriations letters, cosponsoring bills, etc.)
- **Prepare for Leadership or Staff Turnover:** Congressional offices experience frequent turnover among staffers, so you may need to reintroduce yourself periodically to new staffers that handle AmeriCorps policy. When staff change:
  - Introduce yourself and provide a short overview of your program
  - Offer to serve as a local resource
  - Reference any previous engagement with the office

## Build Toward a Champion

Over time, aim to deepen the relationship:

- Move from awareness → understanding → support → active advocacy
- Encourage participation in events, public statements, or caucus involvement

## Be Consistent and Respectful

Congressional offices manage many competing priorities. Consistent, respectful engagement – grounded in local impact – helps build credibility and long-term trust.

## Conclusion

AmeriCorps exists because communities across the country continue to demonstrate its value. Your voice, data, and stories help policymakers understand how national service strengthens the communities they represent. Through thoughtful, nonpartisan engagement, you ensure that the impact of AmeriCorps in your community is seen, understood, and supported. The resources in the following appendices are designed to help you take the next steps with confidence.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Common Tough Questions

*When asked tough questions, refer to the strategies in Chapter 2 and tailor your response to your audience and community. Here are suggested responses to common questions to get you started.*

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

- AmeriCorps members become embedded in communities, working with local organizations and leaders, 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, including private, philanthropic, and local sources. 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 are providing on-the-ground support to critical community programs in schools, food banks, homeless shelters, health centers, 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.

**Do you think we should prioritize funding for AmeriCorps over [other federally funded programs, e.g. cancer research programs]? / Where should we cut funding to fully fund AmeriCorps?**

*[It is important to be sympathetic with the challenging decisions staff and members of Congress will face, but do not answer these types of questions directly. It is **NOT** your responsibility to assess the funding needs of other federal programs. It **IS** your responsibility to remind Congress that AmeriCorps programs provide critical resources to your community in an efficient, cost-effective way.]*

- I can't speak to the full federal budget or other programs. I know Congress has to balance many priorities and has difficult decisions to make. What I can share is that AmeriCorps is a cost-effective, critical investment in our community.

**Is this agency stewarding federal dollars properly? We have heard about audits and claims that the AmeriCorps agency does not conduct proper oversight of its grants.**

- Oversight and accountability are essential, and the concerns raised in recent audits are being taken seriously by both the agency and stakeholders.
- In our experience as a grantee, AmeriCorps has rigorous monitoring practices to ensure compliance with grant requirements. When issues arise, there are clear accountability mechanisms, including corrective actions and recovery of disallowed costs.
- It is also important to distinguish between agency-level audit findings and the oversight of individual programs. The audit issues referenced relate to agency-wide financial systems and processes – not the performance or impact of AmeriCorps programs operating in communities.
- At the same time, AmeriCorps was designed to operate as a lean agency. Over time, administrative funding did not keep pace with program growth, leading to underinvestment in core business operations, including technology and financial systems. This contributed to past audit challenges, including the agency's first disclaimed audit opinion in 2017.
- In response, AmeriCorps launched a multi-year, agency-wide Financial and Operational Reform plan in 2023 to strengthen financial management, address audit findings, and modernize systems. Achieving a sustainable, clean audit is a central goal of this effort.
- This has been a top priority for agency leadership, and meaningful progress is underway. The agency has taken steps to respond to OIG and GAO recommendations, improve internal controls, enhance financial system accuracy, and strengthen overall operations.
- Continued investment supports both the community impact of AmeriCorps programs and the agency's ability to sustain these improvements and ensure strong stewardship of federal resources.

**There are concerns about federal programs becoming too large or inefficient – why should AmeriCorps continue to grow?**

- AmeriCorps is designed as a lean, partnership-based model that relies on local organizations to deliver services, rather than expanding federal bureaucracy.
- Demand for service opportunities and community needs continue to grow, and AmeriCorps provides a cost-effective way to meet those needs through local implementation.
- Continued investment allows AmeriCorps to strengthen oversight, improve systems, and scale proven programs that deliver measurable results in communities.

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

- No, Voices for National Service surveyed AmeriCorps programs in April 2024 and found that grantees impacted by COVID were on the path back to pre-pandemic recruitment outcomes, and demand for AmeriCorps service opportunities has grown by 68% in the last two years.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery period, AmeriCorps programs faced a two-year decline in applications and enrollment. Service, like the broader workforce, was impacted by social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and the ‘great resignation,’ all of which reshaped the way Americans work. Interest started to rebound in 2023, and programs are reporting year-over-year gains in AmeriCorps applications.

**Is AmeriCorps just replacing paid workers or subsidizing jobs that should exist anyway?**

- AmeriCorps members are not intended to replace full-time staff. Instead, they expand the capacity of organizations to meet community needs that would otherwise go unmet.
- Members serve in structured roles designed to complement existing staff and provide additional support, not substitute for permanent positions.
- In many cases, AmeriCorps helps organizations pilot or expand services that can later be sustained through other funding sources or staffing models.

**Why should taxpayers fund AmeriCorps instead of relying on volunteerism or the private sector?**

- AmeriCorps strengthens – not replaces – volunteerism and private sector engagement by bringing together public, private, and nonprofit resources.
- The program provides structure, training, and accountability that enable individuals to serve in high-impact roles that go beyond what traditional volunteer models can support.
- By leveraging matching funds and partnerships, AmeriCorps ensures that federal investment is amplified by local and private contributions.

## Appendix 2: Site Visit Request Template

*This template letter should be customized and emailed to the scheduler or district director.*

Dear [Scheduler/Staffer name],

I am writing on behalf of [organization name], located in [official's district/state], to see if [member of Congress name] is available to visit [specify the program along with a meeting location, time frame, and/or specific dates].

*Example: "City Year, a nonprofit service organization operating in Columbia, invites Senator Tim Scott to visit our program during the August recess to witness firsthand how our AmeriCorps members serve as tutors and mentors for K-12 students. We would be honored to host Senator Scott at Heyward Gibbes Middle School."*

*[Insert a description of your program. In 2-3 sentences, provide a brief overview of your program and explain how AmeriCorps funding and AmeriCorps members help your organization deliver tangible impact in the state or congressional district.]*

*Example: "Across the country, City Year partners with 259 schools and 60 school districts to serve 134,000 students. Schools that partner with City Year are up to two to three times more likely to improve in English and math assessments. Through a visit to Gibbes Middle School, you will have the opportunity to witness the impact that City Year AmeriCorps members are having in Richland County Schools and how resources from AmeriCorps are helping to support this work. You will be able to experience what City Year brings to the school environment, hear about our effective partnership with Richland County Schools, and speak directly with City Year AmeriCorps members about the value of service in the lives of their students and how it is helping them gain in-demand job skills and prepare for success in the workforce."*

AmeriCorps grants and service members provide community organizations with the resources we need to solve local challenges. Unlike most federal grant programs, AmeriCorps grants are matched by funds from private, philanthropic, and local sources, and every \$1 Congress invests in AmeriCorps returns more than \$17 in benefits to communities. AmeriCorps is one of the best investments the federal government can make, and we would welcome the opportunity to show you the impact of this vital program in [district/location name].

The date of this visit is flexible, and we are open to discussing the timing and logistics to accommodate [member of Congress name]'s schedule. I will contact you again in a few weeks to follow up on this invitation, or you can reach me directly at [phone number and email]. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

[Name]

[Title, Organization]

[Phone number]

## Appendix 3: District Meeting Request Template

*This template should be customized and emailed to the scheduler or district director. This is written for an in-person meeting and would need to be customized for a virtual meeting.*

Dear [Scheduler/District Director name],

I am writing on behalf of [organization name], located in [official's district/state], to request a meeting with [member of Congress name] to discuss federal funding for AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps is a valuable resource that is helping local nonprofits address the needs of this community, and we would like to share why it is critical for our community. We hope to meet on [provide time frame or specific dates] but are happy to work with you to accommodate [member of Congress name]'s schedule.

Our group will include:

- [Name, Title, Organization, City]
- [Name, Title, Organization, City]

*[Personalize here in 2–3 sentences, including information about your organization, with a link to any public-facing website, and explain how AmeriCorps funding and members help your organization deliver tangible impact in the state or congressional district.]*

AmeriCorps grants – and the AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers they support – provide our community organizations with the people power that we need to solve local challenges. Unlike most federal grant programs, AmeriCorps grants are matched by funds from private, philanthropic, and local sources. Economists have found that this efficient public-private partnership yields more than \$17 in benefits for every \$1 invested by Congress.

[Our organization] is just one of many local nonprofits that is harnessing the power of AmeriCorps members to help address some of our region's most pressing social and economic challenges. Across [state], there are [#] AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors working hand in hand with local partners to respond to natural disasters, tutor students, combat hunger and homelessness, fight the opioid epidemic, help seniors live independently, support veterans and military families, and much more. Our community and your constituents rely daily on AmeriCorps service members for resources.

I look forward to meeting with [member of Congress name] to share more about our work and the critical role AmeriCorps plays in our ability to serve your constituents. If they are unable to meet with us, we would like to meet with the [District or State] Director. I will contact you again in a few weeks to follow up on this request, or you can reach me directly at [phone number and email]. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

[Name]

[Title, Organization]

[Phone number]

## Appendix 4: Template and Sample Letter to Your Member of Congress

### Letter Template

Dear *[member of Congress name]*,

We are writing on behalf of *[organization name(s)]*, located in *[district/state]*, to convey the value of AmeriCorps to our community and to ask you to protect and support this vital program.

*[Insert 2-3 sentences about your organization, including a brief description of your AmeriCorps program(s), how AmeriCorps funding and members help your organization deliver tangible impact to the state or congressional district, and any relevant data and statistics about the benefits of AmeriCorps.]*

*[Organization name]* is just one of many local organizations harnessing the power of AmeriCorps members to help address some of our region's most pressing social and economic challenges. Across *[state]*, there are *[#]* AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors working hand-in-hand with local partners to respond to natural disasters, tutor students, support veterans and military families, combat hunger and homelessness, fight the opioid epidemic, help seniors live independently, and much more.

AmeriCorps is one of the best investments the federal government can make. AmeriCorps grants and service members provide our community organizations with the people power that we need to solve local challenges, and, unlike most federal grant programs, AmeriCorps grants are matched by funds from private, philanthropic, and local sources. Economists have found that this efficient public-private partnership yields more than \$17 in benefits for every \$1 invested by Congress.

AmeriCorps is a proven, cost-effective, and popular program and is making a tangible difference in *[city/region/state]*. *[Add a sentence explaining why protecting AmeriCorps is essential to your community.]*

We understand that Congress is facing challenging budget decisions, but we hope you will support the federal investment in AmeriCorps, so our community can continue to count on AmeriCorps for help where it's needed most.

Sincerely,

*[Name, Title, Organization]*

*[Name, Title, Organization]*

*[Name, Title, Organization]*

## Sample Letter #1

Dear Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of Voices for National Service and the coalition of national service organizations, state service commissions, and community partners we represent, we are writing to thank you for your leadership in maintaining fiscal year 2026 funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service. Your support ensured that national service programs could continue meeting urgent community needs across the country. We respectfully ask that you continue prioritizing AmeriCorps in the fiscal year 2027 appropriations process.

AmeriCorps provides essential “people power” for communities nationwide. Each year, more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve with local nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations addressing immediate and critical challenges such as disaster response, education, food insecurity, veteran services, and support for older adults. These programs expand the capacity of over 2,000 local organizations to deliver critical services efficiently and effectively. Demand for AmeriCorps partnerships consistently exceeds available resources, with state service commissions and local organizations each year submitting more high-quality proposals than available funding allows.

AmeriCorps also strengthens the workforce and builds future leaders. AmeriCorps members gain practical, in-demand skills that prepare them up for careers in education, public service, healthcare, and other high-need fields, while AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers remain actively engaged in their communities and experience reduced isolation.

For fiscal year 2027, we respectfully request \$1.291 billion for the AmeriCorps agency, representing a modest 2.99 percent increase above the FY26 enacted level. This targeted increase would focus on the programs with the strongest demand – such as AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA, RSVP and State Commission Support Grants – allowing communities to expand proven programs and restore capacity for nonprofit partners and service initiatives that experienced reductions in 2025.

AmeriCorps remains a fiscally responsible investment. Federal funding is matched with significant state, local, and philanthropic resources, and independent analyses show that AmeriCorps generates more than \$17 in community benefits for every \$1 invested by Congress. Continued support will help ensure communities have the resources they need to address local challenges while preparing the next generation of workers and civic leaders.

Thank you again for your continued leadership and commitment to AmeriCorps.

If you need additional information, please contact our Managing Director, Jennifer Ney at [email] or [phone number].

Sincerely,  
Voices for National Service Steering Committee

## Sample Letter #2



**CITY YEAR BATON ROUGE**  
111 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Baton Rouge, LA 70801  
225.663.4220  
cityyear.org

4 Mar 2026

The Honorable Senator Bill Cassidy  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cassidy,

As Board Members of City Year Baton Rouge, an education-focused nonprofit that places AmeriCorps members in under-resourced schools in your community, we are grateful that Congress has appropriated funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service in FY 2026 and ask you to support this critical resource for communities in the FY 2027 appropriations process.

City Year AmeriCorps members serve as student success coaches in K-12 classrooms, helping students achieve, build on their strengths, and cultivate key interpersonal and workforce readiness skills. Over 2,000 City Year AmeriCorps members serve at 247 schools across 58 districts nationally; 45 members serve with City Year Baton Rouge to ensure students in our community have the support they need to reach their full potential.

Research shows that our student success model makes a real difference, providing critical capacity for educators and schools, allowing for more personalized learning and engagement for students. Schools partnering with City Year are two to three times more likely to improve in English and math and more likely to reduce chronic absenteeism. Without City Year AmeriCorps members, students in Baton Rouge will lose access to caring near-peer mentors and the individualized support they provide.

Service with City Year also helps the AmeriCorps members develop in-demand skills for future employers, higher education, and leadership roles. Our City Year alumni are working in a wide range of professions, but 47% are working in education and over 6,000 are classroom teachers, 86% of whom remain in the profession for three years or more. At City Year Baton Rouge, more than 85% of members are from Louisiana, so that talent is often staying within the Baton Rouge area. Without AmeriCorps funding, critical opportunities for talented young adults would be eliminated, restricting pathways to making meaningful contributions to our education system, economy, and local community.

AmeriCorps is a small federal investment that has an outsized impact on our nation, providing community organizations with the people power they need to address urgent local challenges. AmeriCorps grants are matched by private, philanthropic, and local sources, increasing the value of the taxpayer's dollar. This public-private partnership yields more than \$17 in benefits to local communities for every \$1 invested by Congress.

AmeriCorps is a proven, cost-effective, and popular program that makes a tangible difference in Baton Rouge. Thank you for your support of these critical funding streams for programs like City Year. We hope you will join City Year Baton Rouge at a school visit this year, so we can show you the impact City Year student success coaches have in some of our schools and how the federal investment in AmeriCorps strengthens this work.

Thank you again for your support of AmeriCorps and City Year Baton Rouge. To learn more about City Year or to arrange a school visit, please contact Lori Halvorson at [email address] / [phone number].

Sincerely,

The City Year Baton Rouge Advisory Board

[Name, Title, Organization]

[Name, Title, Organization]

[Name, Title, Organization]

## Appendix 5: Template and Sample Letter to the Editor (LTE)

### Letter to the Editor Template

*Below is an LTE template that you can customize with your story and insights, and to fit your local paper's guidelines.*

Subject: [City or State Name] is Stronger Because of AmeriCorps

Dear Editor,

AmeriCorps has empowered more than a million Americans nationally to serve their communities – rebuilding homes after disasters, mentoring students, and helping veterans access care. They are the “people power” behind many of [name of city/state]’s nonprofit and faith-based organizations – including [x, y, and z].

This critical federal investment supports [#, or hundreds/thousands of] “boots on the ground” in our [community/state].

AmeriCorps is a fiscally responsible investment that yields strong returns – \$17 in economic value for every federal dollar. It builds workforce skills, strengthens local nonprofits, and unites Americans through shared purpose – and has received strong bipartisan support for decades.

As our congressional delegation votes on funding for AmeriCorps, I urge them to recognize the importance of this beloved program and ensure it remains a priority.

[Name]

[Title, Organization]

[City, State]

[Email]

[Phone number]

### Sample Letter to the Editor #1

#### **Invest in AmeriCorps, Invest in Louisiana's Future**

By Ge’Ron Tatum and Laura Vinsant

April 1, 2024

<https://voicesforservice.org/news/national-service-in-the-news/nola-invest-in-ameri-corps-invest-in-louisianas-future/>

Across Louisiana, Teach For America’s network of 600 teachers and district leaders have been working with local students, families and communities in New Orleans and Baton Rouge for over 30 years to increase learning and opportunities for Louisiana’s students.

This work is possible in large part because of AmeriCorps, whose funding is in jeopardy. Cuts to AmeriCorps funding would hurt our ability to recruit and retain exceptional leaders who want to make an impact in Louisiana's classrooms. At a time when our students are making up for historic learning losses, we must invest in AmeriCorps.

Teach For America calls for a renewed investment in AmeriCorps, which, for three decades, has brought more than one million people together in service, with nearly 50,000 individuals serving in 10,000 K-12 schools. Teach For America teachers, known as corps members, are also AmeriCorps members.

Participation in AmeriCorps enables our corps members to defer their undergraduate loans for the first two years of teaching and have the interest accrued during those two years paid off by the federal government. AmeriCorps helps bring more leaders into education and serves students by reducing the financial barriers to entering the teaching profession.

AmeriCorps is a program that represents good outcomes with good value for taxpayers. Private, philanthropic and local sources match every AmeriCorps grant dollar. Every \$1 Congress invests in AmeriCorps returns more than \$17 in investment to communities.

Now is not the time to cut funding to AmeriCorps. Louisiana's kids – and all children – deserve an education system brimming with educators. We're calling on Congress to keep AmeriCorps whole, and invest in the future of Louisiana's young people.

*Ge'Ron Tatum is the Executive Director at Teach For American New Orleans and Laura Vinsant is the Executive Director at Teach For America Greater Baton Rouge.*

## Sample Letter to the Editor #2

### **Serving Community**

By Amanda Nipper

February 26, 2026

<https://voicesforservice.org/news/national-service-in-the-news/northwest-arkansas-democrat-gazette-l-serving-community/>

When families in Arkansas need tutoring support, community outreach, or help strengthening local nonprofits, AmeriCorps members are often there – quietly serving and making a measurable difference.

The recent bipartisan decision by Congress to sustain funding for AmeriCorps in the fiscal year 2026 appropriations package is a win for Arkansas communities. This funding allows service programs across our state to continue addressing local needs while developing the next generation of civic-minded leaders.

AmeriCorps is not an abstract federal program. It is neighbors serving neighbors – supporting education, health initiatives, workforce development, and nonprofit capacity in communities large and

small. These partnerships expand what local organizations can do and connect valuable resources to the people who need them most.

I want to thank Sen. John Boozman, Rep. French Hill and others for their leadership and support of AmeriCorps. Their commitment reflects a shared understanding that national service is a practical, bipartisan investment in stronger, more resilient communities.

Sustaining AmeriCorps funding means sustaining opportunity, service, and impact across Arkansas. I appreciate our congressional delegation for standing behind those who serve and the communities they support.

*Amanda Nipper serves as a Commissioner on the EngageAR Arkansas Commission for National Service.*

## Appendix 6: Op-Ed Template and Samples

### Op-Ed Template

Sample Headline: [City or State Name] is Stronger Because of AmeriCorps

1. Open with one to three paragraphs that emphasize the tangible impact of AmeriCorps in the region; this could include:
  - **Anecdotes** about one or two people whose lives were made better because of your local AmeriCorps program.
  - Ideally the piece should include their name(s) and personal story(ies). For example: If discussing the impact of an after-school program on a student, you could include a vignette from the student, their parent, the student's teacher, or the AmeriCorps member whose service resulted in the positive change.
  - **Data:** Wherever possible, cite specific impact data that backs up the anecdotal evidence or personal story. For example: a school may be able to affirm improved attendance records, test scores, etc.
2. Next, connect these stories to the broader narrative from the region/program and, wherever possible, connect back to national data on AmeriCorps' impact on the same issues.
  - Connect to your state: Consider citing other AmeriCorps programs across the state that are fulfilling similar local needs. Access state and city-specific data using the AmeriCorps Service Map on the AmeriCorps.gov homepage.
  - Connect nationally: Use national statistics that relate to the op-ed topic. For example, if you are writing an op-ed related to education, you could note that, *"Nearly 36,000 AmeriCorps members serve annually at more than 9,500 K-12 schools. Additionally, AmeriCorps Seniors tutor and mentor over 90,000 children each year."*
3. The concluding paragraph should re-emphasize the call to action and work in AmeriCorps' messages.
  - For example, "AmeriCorps is built on the notion that the best solutions come from states and communities, not Washington. Through partnerships with faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and local businesses, AmeriCorps ensures that service efforts are uniquely tailored to the specific needs of each community. AmeriCorps also stands as a model for tax dollar return on investment. For every federal dollar invested, AmeriCorps generates an impressive \$17 in economic value – demonstrating how a well-structured public-private partnership can multiply the impact of taxpayer dollars."
  - "Congress is facing challenging funding decisions, but AmeriCorps is not the place to cut. By fostering workforce development, facilitating community-oriented solutions through public-private partnerships, and strengthening national resilience to natural disasters, AmeriCorps delivers tangible, cost-effective results for taxpayers. With the support of [Congressman Smith], AmeriCorps can continue to be a vital resource for [city or state name] and America for decades to come."

## Sample Op-Ed #1

### **We served with Vet Corps. We saw it save lives. We need to expand it.**

By Anthony Sandoval and Eric Burns

November 10, 2024

<https://www.theolympian.com/opinion/op-ed/article295257979.html>

Each November, we talk a lot about how we need to improve support for America's veterans. We lament over high suicide rates and the many barriers preventing veterans from accessing care.

Vet Corps is a group that does more than just talk and lament – they act. We know because we served with them, and we experienced how their work saves lives.

Vet Corps, an AmeriCorps program coordinated by the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, embeds veterans and individuals from military families on campuses to connect with fellow veterans and help them navigate their transition into civilian life. Vet Corps members host gatherings, help other veterans access resources, and facilitate workshops on academic habits and “learning how to learn.”

Vet Corps positions are funded by AmeriCorps through Serve Washington and include a living allowance, professional development, and an education award.

As two veterans and alumni of Vet Corps, we understand this program's power. We remember the community we built, marked by joyful events, service projects, and mutual support. But we also remember harder days, like when a student veteran suddenly vanished off the grid, refusing contact with loved ones. Or when a Marine Corps veteran started struggling, but put up walls against anyone trying to help.

As veterans, we don't need an explanation for these behaviors – we already understand. In the military, background aside, you're part of a unit; you share the same mission, challenges, and rigid schedule. Some of us shared the same traumas and saw the same horrific things. Being launched from a cohesive unit abroad to a college campus back home, where your experience is rare, can feel like whiplash.

This whiplash feeling impacted us both.

One of us came home with severe survivor's guilt; the haunting imagery from a deployment in Afghanistan left no room for joy, leaving instead only PTSD and suicidal ideation.

One of us came home from Iraq and tried to replace the structure and physicality of the service with football, struggled with drinking, and did not form a memory for eight years, due to the confluence of pressure on the body and mind.

We were both searching for purpose, seeking community, and grappling with complicated feelings about the service. We were each referred to our campus centers for military support – one of us at Pacific Lutheran University, and one of us at Wenatchee Valley College.

There, we connected with Vet Corps, which saved both our lives. It afforded us the opportunity to find meaning and service post-military. Our mentors encouraged us to try ideas informed by our own experiences and talents. We connected with hundreds of other veterans who needed someone who spoke their language to help them find their path. We found belonging and purpose.

For 15 years, federal funding through AmeriCorps has supported 600 Vet Corps members, including 41 who served last year. These members have improved, and even saved, the lives of thousands of veterans.

This year, funding constraints led to a reduction in Vet Corps' footprint. While there have been calls to increase funding for AmeriCorps so it can continue supporting programs like Vet Corps, the agency has not received the increase to meet nationwide needs.

Today, we both work for the Washington Department of Veteran Affairs with the SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program. Vet Corps offered us a chance to give back on campus, and later opened doors for us to secure permanent, meaningful employment that allows us to continue our service and live out our purpose.

This Veterans Day, we share gratitude for the strong community we found through Vet Corps, and we are proud of the impact of our service in Washington. We share a hope that in the future, AmeriCorps programs like Vet Corps will exist across every county in every state, so there is a home for more of these communities, and we can continue having each other's backs here at home.

*Anthony Sandoval and Eric Burns are staff with SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Program at Washington Department of Veterans Affairs and AmeriCorps alumni with Vet Corps.*

## Sample Op-Ed #2

### **AmeriCorps is the Backbone of Community Service in Maine**

By Steve Niles

September 17, 2025

<https://voicesforservice.org/news/portland-press-herald-ameri-corps-is-the-backbone-of-community-service-in-maine/>

Congress should prioritize robust funding to help keep this organization healthy and thriving.

Mainers are self-reliant: we believe that local people can solve local problems. Local communities know what their needs are, and they know how to fix their own problems. Neighbors help neighbors.

Sometimes, however, neighbors alone are not enough. That's where AmeriCorps has stepped in, again and again providing the missing piece to making those locally designed fixes happen, providing that key nugget of help to realizing a community's solution.

Right now, AmeriCorps funding is in peril, despite the fact that both Sen. Susan Collins and Sen. Angus King have both been longtime champions of AmeriCorps. Now that Congress is back from August recess, it should prioritize robust funding for AmeriCorps in the appropriations process.

For example, in rural Caribou, when socially isolated seniors weren't able to get transportation to their doctors, their pharmacies and their grocery stores, although the town's Center for the Advancement of Rural Living knew what the solution was, it couldn't make it happen until AmeriCorps member Sharon Berz jumped in.

Sharon, who is herself retired after a career in aging services, pulled together and managed a team of volunteer drivers. Also as a part of her services she works with a small group of volunteers delivering 80-plus hot, well-balanced meals weekly.

AmeriCorps not only improves health outcomes for these aging rural men and women, it forges community connections and reduces isolation.

AmeriCorps members fight the opioid epidemic in Maine. In Winthrop, AmeriCorps member Jamie Bannister serves at An Angel's Wing, a sober-living recovery program that supports residents and their community to address substance misuse and opiate addiction. Goodwill Public Health AmeriCorps member Missy Dewitt, also in Caribou, keeps recovery houses safe and supportive for residents on their journey of recovery.

AmeriCorps members combat poverty in the Goodwill VISTA Partnership, with members serving across Maine and New Hampshire in a broad range of initiatives – broad because local people tell us the problem and the solution. Maine communities know what they need. AmeriCorps is there to help.

Goodwill Northern New England has placed over 310 AmeriCorps members to catalyze and amplify the work being done in community organizations over the past three years. AmeriCorps members have recruited or managed over 1,900 volunteers, who in turn contributed over 29,000 hours of service in their communities.

They've mentored over 1,600 youth identified by guidance counselors or staff as needing help, and they've successfully raised over \$375,000 for local service projects.

AmeriCorps plays a crucial role in supporting community service efforts across Maine, helping organizations better serve those who need it most.

We hope others on Capitol Hill can follow the lead of our senators. Sen. Collins believes that "National service should not be a Democratic issue or a Republican issue. It's an American issue." Sen. King reflected that "Their work has been essential to our communities, and we should be taking every possible opportunity to expand these national service programs."

Goodwill Northern New England, and many others like us across America, rely on AmeriCorps members to serve our communities every day through people like Sharon, Jamie and Missy – who help to solve some of our nation's biggest challenge by pairing local problems with local solutions.

*Steve Niles is director of AmeriCorps programs for Goodwill Northern New England.*