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Serve DC — The Mayor's  
Office on Volunteerism



# Life **After** AmeriCorps *Resource Guide*





## Introduction

Serve DC – The Mayor’s Office on Volunteerism developed the Life After AmeriCorps Resource Guide to support AmeriCorps members serving in Washington, DC with planning a successful transition strategy for next steps after a service term. The advice, suggestions, and recommendations included in this guide speak to a variety of post-service pathways and were compiled from a range of resources that included an online survey completed by DC-area AmeriCorps alumni. Serve DC appreciates all of the contributions that helped shape this guide and we hope that it provides AmeriCorps members with ideas to carry their commitment to service beyond AmeriCorps.

This guide is not comprehensive on all resources and information related to “Life After AmeriCorps” and should be used as a companion to websites like the Corporation for National and Community Service ([www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)) and the CNCS Knowledge Network ([www.nationalserviceresources.gov](http://www.nationalserviceresources.gov)). CNCS maintains the most up-to-date information related to AmeriCorps and some material included in this guide may be dated.

The guide is not meant to be an endorsement by Serve DC. Serve DC is not liable for any action taken based on content of the guide. The guide includes websites where language, resources, and content are referenced from other sources and additional information can be found. The guide also includes personal tips and recommendations from local AmeriCorps alumni.

Serve DC – The Mayor’s Office on Volunteerism is the District of Columbia Government agency dedicated to promoting service as an innovative, sustainable solution to pressing social challenges. Serve DC engages District communities by building partnerships and organizational capacity, leading local and national volunteer and service initiatives, and providing and promoting meaningful service opportunities. For additional information please see: [www.serve.dc.gov](http://www.serve.dc.gov).

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## Self-Assessment & Goal Setting

### Linking Your AmeriCorps Service to Transition Planning

It is never too early to start planning for your transition from AmeriCorps by considering how personal and professional goal setting for your current AmeriCorps position can be leveraged for next steps. As a first step, it is important to start defining who you are, where you would like to go, and what you need to do to get there.

Here are some tips on how to get started:

- Create an individual development plan to outline goals and identify the support you need to be successful with your AmeriCorps position. Consider how you can use this plan to reflect on your interests, skills, and passion. Make “SMART” goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely.
- Reflect on your personal preferences by researching self-assessment tools like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. For VISTA members, the VISTA Campus has a “VISTA Works Self-Assessment”. These types of self-assessments help you determine your preferences and work styles, which can be insightful as you think about the types of opportunities you would like to consider at the end of your service term.
- Create a schedule and set aside time on a regular basis to research “Life After AmeriCorps” opportunities. Hold yourself accountable by starting a peer group of AmeriCorps members to regularly schedule check-ins or resource sharing. Remember that you are not the only one who is planning for post-service life!
- Start to build a portfolio of work from your AmeriCorps service year. This portfolio could be useful as you prepare applications for school or provide examples for job interviews.
- Keep a journal about your service year to reflect on the experience.
- During your service year, track and quantify your service. This will make it easier for you to tell your “AmeriCorps Story” later in an interview, application, or on your resume.
- Seek a mentor in a field that you are interested in pursuing after AmeriCorps.
- Schedule an informational interview with someone in a field that you are interested in pursuing after AmeriCorps. You can ask questions about what steps that person took to get there.
- Take time to reflect on yourself and do a personal inventory of where you find your passion. Create a list of what you like or would change about your AmeriCorps year.
- Start looking at job descriptions that interest you to decide how you might be able to set goals over your AmeriCorps year to decide what skills and experience you will need in the future. In reading lots of job positions and putting aside the ones that interest you the most, you can start figuring out the commonalities.
- Write your ideal job description and list the roles and responsibilities that you enjoy.
- During your AmeriCorps year, take on leadership roles that will challenge you and allow you to explore potential career options.

- Participate in Life After AmeriCorps online and in-person training sessions. Give your supervisor feedback on specific resources that are helpful to you for your future plans and ask for assistance.
- Read LinkedIn profiles and think about which ones are you drawn to (and why) and what career paths get your attention.
- Start exploring which field or industry interests you and sign up for related newsletters, find social media to stay connected, and read relevant articles.

Additionally, AmeriCorps members can access the online the “What’s Next: Life After Your Service” resource on the CNCS Knowledge Network at <https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/whatsnext/welcome>. This tutorial provides information for AmeriCorps members on service transition planning to include going to school, establishing a career, and continuing service. There are also VISTA-focused Life After AmeriCorps resources on the VISTA Campus at [www.vistacampus.org](http://www.vistacampus.org). These online resources update the “Life After AmeriCorps: Next Steps” Guide: [https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/filemanager/download/Next\\_Steps/NextSteps.pdf](https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/filemanager/download/Next_Steps/NextSteps.pdf).

## Post-AmeriCorps Logistical Planning & Transition

Beyond finding that perfect opportunity after your AmeriCorps year, there are several logistical considerations connected to your service that also require preparation. Content in this section is from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) website at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov). Please check the CNCS website for updates and additional details.

### ***Segal AmeriCorps Education Award***

Upon successful completion of a term of service, members are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award. The award may be used to pay costs at eligible, post-secondary educational institutions (including many technical schools and GI-Bill approved educational programs), as well as to repay qualified student loans. Currently, members may earn up to the value of two full-time education awards and have seven years from the date they earned each award to use it. The dollar amount of a full-time award is tied to the maximum amount of the U.S. Department of Education's Pell Grant (and it may change by year). Please check with your supervisor to confirm the amount of the award for the year that you are serving. As an alternative to the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, AmeriCorps VISTA members may choose to receive a post-service cash stipend at the end of their service. Please also see the CNCS website for information on award limitations.

#### Award Use

The award can be used in one of, or a combination of, the following ways:

- To repay *qualified student loans*.<sup>1</sup>
- To pay all or part of the *current education*<sup>2</sup> expenses to attend a *qualified institution*<sup>3</sup> of higher education (including certain vocational schools) and educational programs approved under the Montgomery G.I. Bill and the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill.

#### Award Transfers

The Serve America Act allows for the transfer of AmeriCorps State and National and Silver Service education awards under certain conditions. The person who earned the award has to have been at least 55-years old when they began the term of service and the person to whom the award is transferred has to be the transferring individual's child (including step-child), grandchild (including step-grandchild), or foster child.

To transfer an award, an individual must:

- Have earned an education award in an AmeriCorps State and National or a Silver Scholar term of service;
- Have been at least 55 years of age before beginning the term of service for the subject award;

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<sup>1</sup> A qualified student loan as a loan backed by the federal government under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (except PLUS Loans to parents of students) or under Titles VII or VIII of the Public Health Service Act. You may also use your Segal AmeriCorps Education Award to repay a student loan made to you by a state agency, including state institutions of higher education.

<sup>2</sup> Educational expenses that can be paid include: 1. The "Cost of Attendance" (COA) for a degree- or certificate-granting program of study at a Title IV school. The COA may include tuition, books and supplies, transportation, room and board, and other expenses. Each Title IV school's financial aid office determines their students' COA based upon standard U.S. Department of Education guidance. 2. Educational expenses for non-degree courses, such as continuing education courses or workshops offered by Title IV schools. Educational expenses that can be paid normally include tuition & fees, books, and supplies, as determined by the school's administrative office. 3. Courses or training programs authorized under the Montgomery G.I. Bill and the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. These courses and programs have been approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs for GI Bill educational benefits. The educational institutions or training establishments that offer these courses and training programs will have a VA-approved Certifying Official who can determine eligible expenses.

<sup>3</sup> Qualified schools are higher educational institutions that currently participate in the Department of Education's Title IV student aid programs (referred to as Title IV schools).

- Have begun this term of service on or after October 1, 2009;
- Transfer the award before the original expiration date;
- Designate all or a portion of the unused award for the transfer;
- Complete the forms authorizing the transfer, which includes providing information and certifying eligibility.

### Award Taxes

The IRS has determined that payments made from an education award are considered to be included in a member's taxable income in the year the payment is made to the school or loan holder. Interest payments are also considered taxable. This increase in your income could affect your tax liability for that year.

CNCS does not withhold taxes from the award. By the end of January each year, CNCS sends a 1099 Form to all AmeriCorps members who have made payments from their education awards and for whom interest payments have been made totaling more than \$600.00 during the previous year. The 1099 Form does not need to be submitted to the IRS with a member's tax return, but it reflects the amount that CNCS reports as taxable miscellaneous income to the IRS.

W-2s are used to report to the IRS that portion of the living allowance or stipend that is taxable. It is not used for reporting on the amount of the education award used. AmeriCorps State and National members receive their W-2s from the program where they served. AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC members receive their W-2s from CNCS.

Reference: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/segal-ameriCorps-education-award>.

### **Personal Finance**

Throughout your AmeriCorps year, budgeting is a necessity. It's also important to consider personal finance choices for your post-service transition as you plan for potential gaps in employment, moving to a new place (or staying where you served!), cost of living, or becoming a student.

- Create a budget to estimate costs for the first few months after your AmeriCorps service. Research budget templates or use online resources like [www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com) to make a plan for how you will pay expenses after AmeriCorps.
- Set up an emergency fund, which is a fund where you can put aside between three- and six-months worth of post-tax income in case of an emergency. A strategy for not spending from this fund is to set it up in a different account from the accounts you use to pay expenses.
- Seek out resources like the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Programs, which offer free tax help for taxpayers who qualify. Information on the programs can be found at: <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Free-Tax-Return-Preparation-for-You-by-Volunteers>. Additionally, AARP offers tax aid and information that can be found here: [http://www.aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp\\_taxaide](http://www.aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp_taxaide).
- Access member discounts if you join AmeriCorps Alums after your year of service. For an up-to-date listing of discounts see the AmeriCorps Alums website at: [www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org).
- Research cost of living expenses through resources like the Location Affordability Portal, which seeks to help consumers, researchers, and policymakers better understand the impact of transportation costs on affordability. <http://locationaffordability.info>.



## **Leveraging Your Service Experience & Telling Your AmeriCorps Story**

Despite which pathway an AmeriCorps member takes, there are some common areas where members transitioning from their service year need to leverage the service experience and be able to tell their “AmeriCorps Story”.

### ***Networking***

Increasing your social capital is an important step to getting connected to new opportunities. Networking can happen in formal and informal settings where you have an opportunity to share your interests and passion to see where you can explore next steps.

- Create and practice your “AmeriCorps Elevator Speech”. If you were explaining your service to someone for the length of an elevator ride, how would you concisely and clearly talk about your service? This will be helpful in any type of interview.
- Print business cards to hand out at networking events and meetings.
- Maintain a database of your contacts through your AmeriCorps service and make sure that they have a long-term email or contact information for you.
- Attend networking events where you have the opportunity to connect and make contacts. Examples: Young Nonprofit Professionals Network ([www.ynnpn.org](http://www.ynnpn.org)) and AmeriCorps Alums ([www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org)).
- Consider joining a board or taking on a leadership role to demonstrate your talents, skills, and abilities.
- Get published. Consider writing articles or newsletters on topics related to your field of interest.
- Create a LinkedIn account to get connected. LinkedIn’s mission is “to connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. When you join LinkedIn, you get access to people, jobs, news, updates, and insights that help you be great at what you do”. Please see [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com).
- Keep your LinkedIn account updated and stay connected to colleagues. There are also forums and groups to connect with on LinkedIn.
- Schedule informational interviews with contacts in your field of interest to make an in-person connection.
- Use existing relationships at your service site to get connected. As an example, you can connect with the board of directors of your service site for informational interviews.
- Connect through social media, but be mindful of what information you have posted. Consider the fact that many employers search sites like Facebook to learn about their potential staff.

### ***Resume Writing***

It is important for AmeriCorps members to capture and quantify their service year in a clear and powerful way. Here are some tips and strategies for creating a strong resume:

- Translate your resume into “non-AmeriCorps terms” and avoid using lingo. Consider how the skills you developed during AmeriCorps translate to the opportunity that you’re seeking.
- Use action words and focus on the impact of your service.
- Proofread your resume and ask one or two additional people to edit it.

- Keep the format clean and easy to read.
- Be specific about your accomplishments and quantify them whenever possible.
- Put yourself in the position of someone who will read 100 resumes and consider what will make yours stand out from the rest.
- Frame AmeriCorps as professional experience on your resume.
- Create a “Master” resume that lists all of your experiences, education, and awards so you can modify it to apply for a specific position as needed.
- Always submit a cover letter unless the application instructions state that one is not needed.
- Always tailor the cover letter for individual positions.
- Create cover letters that “sell” you and your accomplishments. It should be clear and concise.
- Be prepared to be asked for references and ask permission of your references to share contact information
- Be prepared to be asked for letters of recommendation.

### ***Interviewing***

Telling your AmeriCorps story can be part of your interview process where you are sharing your strengths and accomplishments to demonstrate how they can relate to a new opportunity. This section has advice on how to approach having an interview.

- Follow up after all interviews with an email or phone call to thank the interviewer for his or her time.
- If you did not get a job offer, follow up to ask for feedback on your application. This information will make your next application stronger.
- Be prepared for an interview with examples of your accomplishments and tell a story.
- Do research on the organization where you are interviewing and prepare questions for the interviewers.
- Practice and ask a friend or colleague to interview you in order to anticipate questions that will be asked during the actual interview.
- Be on time.
- Don’t be afraid to admit if you do not have specific experience, but demonstrate how you plan to get there
- Research common interview questions and prepare answers.
- Consider how AmeriCorps service translates to non-service positions by sharing transferable skills such as management, leadership, and developing resources.
- Be prepared with a short explanation of AmeriCorps, in case the person interviewing is not familiar with AmeriCorps.

## Pathways to Next Steps

Your AmeriCorps experience has you well-positioned for a variety of experiences post-service. This section is not a comprehensive list of recommendations, but it is designed to get you started in thinking about which pathway will work for you.

### ***Education***

These are some tips and recommendations for AmeriCorps members thinking about going or returning to school after the service term.

- Look into how you can best leverage your Education Award and seek out information from the campus financial aid office if you would like to look into allowable cost of attendance expenses.
- Find out if the institution offers academic or other incentives to AmeriCorps members to include academic credit, preference for scholarships, waived application fees, or discounted housing fees.
- Research schools and universities that actively recruit AmeriCorps Alums and match the Segal Education Award. A list of institutions that match can be found on the CNCS website at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov). Also directly contact listed institutions to verify the match or benefits offered.
- Visit a campus in person and seek out opportunities to talk with students and faculty.
- Attend a grad school fair to talk with campus representatives. Idealist ([www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)) offers graduate school fairs at least annually in many major cities.
- Research [www.usanews.com](http://www.usanews.com) or [www.petersons.com/college-search.aspx](http://www.petersons.com/college-search.aspx) for college and university programs.
- Start researching application deadlines early to ensure that you will have materials in place.
- Consider informational interviews with contacts in fields of interest to determine options for education programs and degrees.
- Consider if you need the degree to get into your field of interest and if you do, think about the cost and time involved.

### ***Continuing Service***

These resources provide information for AmeriCorps members considering a second year of AmeriCorps, other types of domestic service, or international service opportunities.

- Be familiar with the terms and limits of AmeriCorps service for eligibility for the Education Award if you are considering a second year of AmeriCorps (see [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov) and “Segal AmeriCorps Education Award” section in this Guide).
- Seek out second-year opportunities by talking with other AmeriCorps members about their service experiences or get recommendations from your supervisor.

- Research international service opportunities. Example: Peace Corps ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)).
- Consider an international or domestic fellowship. Example: Atlas Corps ([www.atlascorps.org](http://www.atlascorps.org)).
- Approach your research for international or domestic service opportunities through informal routes like connecting with like-minded individuals involved with social change on websites like CouchSurfing ([www.couchsurfing.org](http://www.couchsurfing.org)) or the Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree Forum ([www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/index.jspa](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/index.jspa)).
- Consider exchange programs. Example: Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme ([www.jetprogramme.org](http://www.jetprogramme.org)), which is aimed at promoting grass-roots international exchange between Japan and other nations.

### **Job Search**

These recommendations are for AmeriCorps members exploring employment after the service term.

- Get organized and create a chart of places where you applied, point of contact, and application deadline to track your job applications.
- Anticipate that the job application process may be long and explore temporary options as you search (such as temp agencies that place individuals in short-term employment at nonprofits or in specific fields or industries).
- Seek out opportunities within AmeriCorps-related organizations. The Corporation for National and Community Service website has a listing of "AmeriCorps in Your State" at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).
- Research options for utilizing college career centers. If you're researching away from where you went to school, there may be an opportunity to seek out whether or not your campus and a local campus can establish an agreement for you to utilize alumni resources like job search databases.
- Seek out job shadowing opportunities.
- Consider jobs in federal government ([www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov)), state government, or city government (in Washington, DC: <http://dchr.dc.gov/page/careers>). In some cases, you can set up alerts that send updates to your email account on a regular basis based on search terms, type of job, and location.
- Search job boards on websites like [www.vistacampus.org](http://www.vistacampus.org), [www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org), [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org), [www.higheredjobs.com](http://www.higheredjobs.com), [www.opajobs.com](http://www.opajobs.com) (public affairs), and [www.indeed.org](http://www.indeed.org). In some cases, you can set up alerts that send updates to your email account on a regular basis based on search terms, type of job, and location.
- Read classified sections of newspapers or online on websites like [www.hillzoo.com](http://www.hillzoo.com) and [www.rollcall.com](http://www.rollcall.com) (Washington, DC jobs on Capitol Hill).
- Keep informed about the field that you want to go into and learn about current trends or organizations that are in your field of interest. Resources for nonprofits include the Nonprofit Times ([www.nptimes.com](http://www.nptimes.com)), the Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington ([www.nonprofitroundtable.org](http://www.nonprofitroundtable.org)), and the Center for Nonprofit Advancement ([www.nonprofitadvancement.org](http://www.nonprofitadvancement.org)).

- Research salary and employer reviews on websites like: [www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com) or [www.payscale.com](http://www.payscale.com). Consider the transition from an AmeriCorps living stipend to a salaried job and research salaries in the field you are pursuing. Also, consider benefits packages when reviewing opportunities.
- Consider starting a business or nonprofit and talk to others who have been involved with a start-up. Please see a nonprofit planning resource for Washington, DC: <http://brc.dc.gov/nonprofit/nonprofit.asp>.
- Consider Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) status when applying for federal jobs for one year if you are an AmeriCorps VISTA member. For additional details, please see: [www.vistacampus.org](http://www.vistacampus.org).

## Staying Connected

After your AmeriCorps term, there are a variety of ways to stay connected to National Service and volunteer service.

### AmeriCorps Alums

In taking the AmeriCorps pledge, members commit to a “lifetime of service,” and a great resource to stay connected with the AmeriCorps network is by getting involved with a local AmeriCorps Alums chapter or finding out if your AmeriCorps program has a program-specific alumni network. AmeriCorps Alums National is an enterprise of the Points of Light dedicated to building a community of experienced volunteer leaders committed to a lifetime of service.

During your AmeriCorps year you can benefit from a variety of AmeriCorps Alums resources that are made available to current members such as webinars, online resources, and career development support. The AmeriCorps Alums website has information about benefits available to Alums and also provides a job board. Please see:

[www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org).

### Life Reimagined, Real Possibilities from AARP

To help people navigate and adapt to a new life phase, AARP is launching Life Reimagined, designed to address unmet needs for millions of people seeking inspiration, information and guidance. Life Reimagined is rooted in a simple methodology, easy-to-use tools, content and connections to a community of people with shared interests. It signals a “new” AARP, focused on individuals and the resources they need to pursue all their possibilities and achieve their goals and dreams. Accessed both online and offline, the Life Reimagined experience offers a flexible, step-by-step approach to help people discover new possibilities, guide and prepare them for the change they want, and support them as they make it happen. See Life Reimagined at: <http://lifereimagined.aarp.org/how-it-works#how-it-works>.

### Serve DC- The Mayor’s Office on Volunteerism

Serve DC offers resources for getting involved with service in the District of Columbia to include a regular newsletter and NeighborGood, a online database of volunteer opportunities in DC (NeighborGood can be accessed on the Serve DC website at [www.serve.dc.gov](http://www.serve.dc.gov)) Additionally, Serve DC launched the AmeriCorps in DC website to provide a connecting point for all-things AmeriCorps in Washington, DC. This can be found at [www.dcamericorps.org](http://www.dcamericorps.org).





THE MAYOR'S OFFICE ON VOLUNTEERISM

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[WWW.SERVE.DC.GOV](http://WWW.SERVE.DC.GOV)

FRANK D. REEVES MUNICIPAL CENTER  
2000 14TH STREET, NW | SUITE 101  
WASHINGTON, DC | 20009  
MAIN (202) 727-7925 | FAX (202) 727-9942

