VHCB AmeriCorps
Member Handbook

Program Practices and Policies

Section 3
Members are contracted to fulfill the following number of hours –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VHCB AmeriCorps required hours</th>
<th>CNCS required minimum hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Full-time: <strong>1720</strong></td>
<td>• Full-time: <strong>1700</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Half-time: <strong>915</strong></td>
<td>• Half-time: <strong>900</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quarter-time: <strong>460</strong></td>
<td>• Quarter-time: <strong>450</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minimum Time: <strong>310</strong></td>
<td>• Minimum Time: <strong>300</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The VHCB AmeriCorps Required Hours are set to ensure you have enough hours to exit the program successfully, and the number of hours that will be used to measure your hours progress throughout the service term. This is the minimum number of hours approved and verified, the member must serve in order to successfully complete the program and receive the education award. The number of hours served may include only up to 20% approved training hours and 10% fundraising hours.

In order to successfully complete the term of service, the member is required to not only complete her/his service hour requirement, but also fulfill the dates of service agreed upon in the contract. In some cases, a contract may be amended if the member, the Program Director, and the Host Site Organization agree (please see following page).

Only hours which are actually served count toward the minimum hours listed above. Members serving in AmeriCorps are not able to claim hours for vacation, sick time, holidays, personal time, etc.

Members operate on a 40 hours per week schedule at the host site. This schedule accounts for members to take time off for short vacations, holidays, and sick time as needed.

**Time Off**

Members that wish to take time off must first clear it with their direct supervisor at their host site. For more than 1 week off, members must inform VHCB AmeriCorps staff that they will be away. For 2 weeks or more off, members must also gain advance approval from the VHCB AmeriCorps Director or Program Coordinator. Timesheets must still be submitted during time off. If the member will be off during a time that a timesheet is due, it should be submitted in advance.

**Time Tracking**

Member’s time is tracked through an online portal known as OnCorps. Member’s time must be approved by the Direct Supervisor and reviewed by VHCB Program Staff. VHCB AmeriCorps staff will regularly review the members’ hours and give regular updates to members, however, it is the
responsibility of the member to regulate hours so as to not fall behind. If a member falls behind in hours, the program may require the member and/or host site to submit a written plan to catch up. If the member is unable or not willing to catch up on hours, the program may exit the member for cause.

In the event that a member is far ahead in hours, the program may also request a plan from the member and/or host site to get back on target. While there is no maximum number of hours that a member may serve, it is not in the interest of the Program for members to burn out, nor wish to leave the program early once hour requirements have been met.

**Early Exit**

Members that do not complete the required hours, discontinue serving before their end date, or otherwise leave the program early will be exited as follows:

**FOR CAUSE:** The member is exited for reasons within his/her control, for unsafe or poor behavior, or other breach of the Member Agreement. The member will not receive any portion of the education award. This reflects poorly on the member’s performance. Examples of “cause” are leaving the AmeriCorps program to accept an employment opportunity, to attend school without completing hours, to relocate, due to a breach of the Member Agreement, undisclosed criminal history appears on member’s record, etc.

**FOR COMPELLING PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES:** When exited for compelling personal circumstances, the member may be eligible for a pro-rated education award. In order to receive a pro-rated education award, the member must have served at least 15% of their total hours.

Examples circumstances beyond the member’s control:

- The member has a serious injury, illness, or other personal health issue that effects their service
- There is a serious injury, illness, or death of an immediate family member and the member is needed to care for that family member
- The member is drafted by the Armed Services of the United States
- Some other circumstance occurs that makes it impossible or very difficult for the member to complete the term of service and if and only if the VHCB Director deems that circumstance to be compelling.
Types of Service Hours

**Service:** Direct Service is the bulk of what the member will do this year. This includes all activities on the position description that is not considered training or fundraising, and all activities that fall within AmeriCorps guidelines.

**Training:** The member will receive extensive training over the course of the service year. Training includes both professional development and technical assistance. Training will be provided by the program, SerVermont, and the member’s host site.

**Fundraising:** While a member may claim up to 10% of hours as fundraising activities, fundraising activities are limited in the following manner:

- Seeking donations of books from companies and individuals for a program in which volunteers teach children to read;
- Writing a grant proposal to a foundation to secure resources to support the training of volunteers;
- Securing supplies and equipment from the community to enable volunteers to help build houses for low-income individuals;
- Securing financial resources from the community to assist in launching or expanding a program that provides social services to the members of the community and is delivered, in whole or in part, through the members of a community-based organization;
- Seeking donations from alumni of the program for specific service projects being performed by current members.

*AmeriCorps members may not:*

- Raise funds for living allowances or for an organization’s general (as opposed to project) operating expenses or endowment
- Write a grant application to the Corporation or to any other Federal agency.

**Other Eligible Hours**

In addition to hours the members serves at the host site, the member will also claim hours for various activities required by the VHCB AmeriCorps Program, SerVermont, or CNCS. Examples include: Program initiatives such as the Independent Service Project, R.A.R.E. Opportunity, Book Club, and Peer Site Visits; time to complete required paperwork and reporting; optional trainings and events to aid in member development, site visits from AmeriCorps staff, etc.
Teleserving

Teleserving, or telecommuting, is the concept of serving from home or another location outside of the provided office space. Teleserving is not a formal, universal member benefit. Rather, it is an alternative method of meeting the needs of the AmeriCorps Position. AmeriCorps positions are meant to provide direct services, and teleserving should be used minimally and only when necessary. VHCB AmeriCorps and/or the HSO have the right to refuse to make teleserving available to a Member and to terminate a teleserving arrangement at any time. Members are not required to teleserve, and adequate office space to perform the duties of the position should be available to members. A member has the right to refuse to teleserve if the option is made available.

Service Benefits and Hours: The AmeriCorps Member’s, benefits, enrollment status, living allowance, and service responsibilities will not change when teleserving. Members are expected to adherence to AmeriCorps and Program rules, regulations, and responsibilities while teleserving.

Eligibility and Limits: Successful teleservers have the support of their supervisors. Members will be allowed to teleserve based on the suitability of their position and the ability of their supervisor to manage the member remotely. Allowing teleservice is at the discretion of the HSO and Supervisor. The HSO may have telecommuting policies that add additional guidelines and restrictions which the member should adhere to. In cases that the policies don’t align, the Member should follow the AmeriCorps Program Policy.

AmeriCorps Service is meant to be direct and have regular interaction with the community. Regularly scheduled teleservice is limited to a maximum of one day per week. Regularly scheduled teleservice must be approved by the host and the VHCB AmeriCorps Program. Irregular teleservice to accommodate poor travel conditions, illness, or other circumstances to warrant require approval from the host site supervisor. Serving “in the field” or attending trainings and events is not considered teleservice. In cases of inclement weather or other instances in which travel would be unsafe, Members may teleserve as necessary, and should never be expected to travel in unsafe conditions.

Workspace and Equipment: The Member must have a suitable workspace and necessary equipment and supplies to serve remotely. At minimum, the Member must be able to be contacted by phone and email, and contact information must be shared with the HSO and VHCB AmeriCorps Program Staff. The HSO may provide specific tools/equipment for the Member to perform duties at their discretion. When the member uses their own equipment, the member is responsible for maintenance and repair of equipment. Any HSO materials taken home should be kept in the designated service area at home and not be made accessible to others. Confidential files and information should not be removed from the HSO office space and only accessed electronically using a secure process.

Communication: Members must be available by phone and email during teleservice hours. At a minimum, Members should check in with their supervisor or other designated representative of the HSO by phone or email at the beginning of their teleservice with a plan of what the Member will be working on. Members must again phone or email to check out at the conclusion of their teleservice, and as necessary throughout the day. Members must be available to remotely attend meetings deemed necessary by the HSO.
Contracted Term

Members are contracted to serve beginning with “start date” through the contracted “end date.” In addition to the target and minimum hours commitment, members are agreeing to be available to serve with the Program and/or with the host site for the entirety of the contracted term.

Members have a maximum of one year to complete the required number of hours at which point, members are no longer eligible to serve. If hours are not complete, the member cannot be exited successfully and nor receive the education award.

Contract Amendments

As unforeseen circumstances may arise over the course of the service term, it may be possible to amend your contract with VHCB AmeriCorps to end early or extend your service. When amending contract dates, a member must still serve the contracted number of service hours. The Host Site Organization and the VHCB AmeriCorps Program must be in agreement with the member’s request for a contract amendment.

To Shorten Term of Service:

If members would like to end service early, and that date is at least nine (9) months after the start date then members should—

- Submit a written letter to the VHCB AC Program Director, at least sixty (60) days prior to the original end date and forty-two (42) days prior to the requested amended end date, listing the new end date and signed by both the member and the site supervisor. If the supervisor does not agree, then the date cannot be changed.
- VHCB AC will review the request and make a decision pursuant to AmeriCorps policies and provisions.

Examples of reasonable amendments to shorten term of service:

- A member may decide to begin Grad school and need to leave the AmeriCorps position 3 weeks early to attend.
- A significant family vacation falls at the end of a member’s service and the member is well ahead of hours and the host site will not need the member’s service during the requested amended period.

To Extend Term of Service:

If members want to extend the end of service date, as long as the date is not more than twelve (12) months after his/her start date then the member should—

- Submit a written letter to the VHCB AmeriCorps Program Director, at least forty-two (42) days prior to the original end date, listing the new end date and signed by both the member and site supervisor; and if the supervisor does not agree, then the date cannot be changed.
- VHCB AmeriCorps will review the request and make a decision pursuant to AmeriCorps policies and provisions.

Examples of reasonable amendments to lengthen a term of service:

- A member may have to unexpectedly take time off to care for an ill child or parent.
- A special project is happening at the host site, and both host site and the member would like to have the member participate.
When amending an end date, the amount of maximum living allowance does not change. The remaining living allowance amount will be recalculated and bi-weekly living allowance payouts will be adjusted accordingly.

A request to amend the contract is not necessary if the new end date will not affect pay periods (within two weeks of contracted end date). Instead, a standard contract amendment included in the exit paperwork should be used.

**Suspension**

If unforeseen circumstances arise, members may be placed in “suspension” at the request of the member or the Program. The time that a member is in suspension does not count toward the one-year limit. While in suspension, the member’s living allowance payments will pause, but any other benefit the member receives through the program will continue (i.e. health care, EAP, etc.). Once a member returns to service, the member’s circumstance and remaining hours will be evaluated and a contract amendment will be made. Suspension of a term may also be utilized for the following:

- If issues arise between a member and host site, and additional time is required to address the situation.
- If a member needs to take extended time off for personal reasons
- The program deems that the member is not acting in accordance to the member agreement or within the Programs’ code of conduct
- The member needs time off to address personal or family health issues, including mental health.
Living Allowance

These are the terms used to describe the financial benefit that members receive from the AmeriCorps program they participate in. The living allowance that AmeriCorps members receive is not considered to be a salary, or an hourly wage. Under the law that established AmeriCorps, a member is not an employee, and will not receive a wage or salary.

For the 2017-2018 program year, members will receive the following maximum living allowance amount -

- Full-time members: $20,400
- Half-time members: $10,800
- Quarter-time members: $5,400

The amounts listed above are gross amounts and do not account for tax and FICA withholding amounts. The member is expected to pay all applicable local, state and federal taxes. These are withheld under standard withholding rules. The member may be eligible for a withholding exemption if no tax liability was withheld last year, and the exemption is expected to remain the same for the upcoming year. Withholding amounts will be based upon federal and state law based on information provided by the member on IRS W-4 form you provide.

The living allowance will be distributed every other week only while the member is actively serving. If a member does not serve during the living allowance period which is a minimum of 15 days in a row, the member should be suspended and will not receive a living allowance during this time.

Your living allowance will be issued via direct deposit every other Thursday. The living allowance is not based on actual hours served in a given pay period and thus will not fluctuate based on the number of hours served per week - it must not be paid on an hourly basis or be tied to hours served in any way. Instead it is divided evenly by the number of pay periods during the members contracted term of service. It is designed to help members meet their living needs while in service. However, if you fall behind in hours are seem to be unable to successfully complete the number of service hours needed to fulfill your contracted term of service by the last day, the Program Director will work with you to modify your schedule to get back on track. Though your living allowance may not be affected, you are at risk of not receiving the Education Award by not completing the number of required hours.

The living allowance may affect the member’s eligibility for various federal assistance programs. The living allowance will not affect eligibility for federal work-study assistance, federal student aid, SSI, food stamps, Section 8 or public housing. It may however affect, AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), SSDI, and Medicaid.

State and private student aid may or may not be affected, depending upon individual school regulations. Effects on state assistance programs will depend on state regulations.
Please note: The timesheet is the primary source of documentation for VHCB AmeriCorps to determine whether or not the member has been actively serving and what activities the member has been performing. If you fail to submit timesheets within a week of its due date, VHCB AmeriCorps will not have record of your service activities and will assume you have not been serving. When this happens, the member will be placed in suspension. When this occurs, living allowance payments are also suspended. The member will be reinstated once all timesheets have been submitted to VHCB AC in full.
Background Checks

All members must submit to a background check. All members are subject to an FBI Criminal History Check, Sex Offender Registry Check, State Repository checks from Vermont and their state of residence, and Adult/Child Abuse Check through the Vermont Agency on Human Services.

Members may not serve unsupervised with vulnerable populations until VHCB AmeriCorps has received at least one of the criminal history checks without a criminal record. Vulnerable populations are defined as youth, elderly, or persons with disabilities. Program staff will notify the member and supervisor once the results have been received and the member is cleared to serve unsupervised.

If the criminal history check results are received with a criminal record, further action will be required. Murder or sexual assault automatically disqualifies a member for service. All other criminal records are taken on a case-by-case basis and will be assessed for relevancy to service, recent activity, and action for recourse. Members will be asked to respond to any criminal records before the conviction will be assessed.

VHCB AmeriCorps may request that the member redo any background checks that are done incorrectly or have delayed results.

Dress Code/AmeriCorps Logo

Members are expected to wear the AmeriCorps logo at all times when in service. This includes while at your office/usual service space, while attending VHCB AmeriCorps events, and when out in the field/community. VHCB AmeriCorps provides members with shirts, sweatshirts, patches, pins, stickers, and nametags.

While members are welcome to sport the AmeriCorps logo while not serving, they should keep in mind that they are representing AmeriCorps while doing so and should therefore refrain from any AmeriCorps prohibited activities when wearing the AmeriCorps logo.

The member being identified as an AmeriCorps member while providing service is essential to the sustainability and longevity of the VHCB AmeriCorps program per the instructions of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Encourage your member to commit to wearing the AmeriCorps Member uniform during all community service outreach hours and during regular service hours.

Attire policies may vary by host Site. Members should adhere to the attire policies of their host sites but also ensure that AmeriCorps uniform expectations are being met.

Adequate safety clothing and equipment should be worn while on any type of construction, environmental, or maintenance duty. Work boots and protective gear must be worn on all assignments that put the member at any level of increased risk of physical harm.
Newsletters/Story of the Week

VHCB AmeriCorps collects and publishes a “story of the week” and produces a newsletter. Each member is expected to submit at least once during their service term. Multiple submissions are welcome. Submissions may be a story of your service, a reflection, a recap of event, something you’ve learned through your service, hints and tips for other members, etc. Please include photos with your submission if possible.

Mandated Reporting

Members are considered Mandated Reporters, which means they must report any cases of abuse witnessed by the Members. Members are required to take the online Mandated Reporter training session through the Vermont Department of children and families, and submit a certificate of completion to the Program. The webinar can be accessed at http://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting/mandated.
Program Benefits

Child Care
Full time AmeriCorps Members are eligible to apply for Childcare benefits. Benefits are based on enrollment status AND income eligibility.
For information on eligibility, contact AmeriCorps Program Staff.

Health Care
Members serving in a full time capacity are eligible for health care provided through VHCB AmeriCorps. The premium is paid entirely by the program; there is no additional cost to members to be enrolled in AmeriCorps Health Plan. Members must accept the AmeriCorps provided health insurance if they do not have access to other health care coverage. More information on the VHCB Health Care plan can be found in section 6.

Travel, Mileage and Accommodations
Costs associated with travel required by VHCB AmeriCorps will be covered or reimbursed in full by the program, including overnight accommodations if required.

All mileage required by the program will be reimbursed at the current IRS rate set for mileage reimbursement. Mileage reimbursement between service sites or otherwise required by the host site is the responsibility of a member’s host site. Host sites will also use the IRS reimbursement rate. Mileage reimbursement cannot be paid for travel to and from the member’s first daily service site – i.e. regular commute travel.

Mileage reimbursement must be turned in to VHCB AmeriCorps within a month of the travel, or the member will risk losing the reimbursement.

More information can be found in section 4.
Benefit Contacts

Health care

The health care plan provided by VHCB AmeriCorps, known as The Corps Network, is administered by Summit America. More info in section 6. For all questions regarding health care benefits, please visit www.summitamerica-ins.com or contact Summit America at:

1-800-301-9128 thecorpsnetwork@summitamerica-ins.com

My AmeriCorps Portal

Program staff is able to answer general questions regarding the education award, loan interest accrual, and school loan forbearance.

For specific questions regarding the education award, interest accrual, forbearance, or for any issues logging in or using the MyAmeriCorps Portal, please contact the Portal help desk at the contact info listed below. This system is administered nationally and program staff does not have any additional access or oversight to members’ accounts.

Help Desk: 800-942-2677
Fax: 703-206-7276
Make a request online at: https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask_mac

The National Service Trust

The trust is the entity that manages the education award. They can be reached at 1-888-507-5960 OR 202-606-5000 ext. 347 or by visiting www.americorps.gov.
Press Guidelines

1. Please describe us as Vermont Housing and Conservation Board AmeriCorps.

2. We work in partnership with twenty-nine non-profit housing and conservation entities statewide, and we and they in turn, work with other community partners such as organizations, schools, groups, etc. While good publicity is always helpful in spreading the word about AmeriCorps, it is important that the community collaboration gets the primary focus of the publicity.

3. Please email all written materials to VHCB staff for pre-approval whenever possible. Send a copy of printed materials to when they’re in print, regardless of prior approval.

4. Do not mention any political party or position when describing our program and/or its services.

5. The AmeriCorps logo may not be used: on materials that will be sold, on promotional materials of donors, or on clothing not worn by members, alums, or affiliated staff. The logo may not be altered or used as a part of any other logo.

6. You may want to use the logo in other materials. Publications (newsletters, etc.) that are distributed externally should include the following acknowledgement and disclaimer when the logo is used prominently:

   “This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of AmeriCorps or the Corporation for National Service.”

7. We must also ensure that publications are consistent with grant provisions limiting member activities (for example, no lobbying or religious materials).

8. It is required that if you are going to disclose the names or photos of community partners in conjunction with articles about AmeriCorps projects, you should obtain permission first. Although verbal permission is legal, written waivers are preferable.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 23, 2009

Contact:
Kate Stephenson
kate@yestermorrow.org
802.496.5545

Yestermorrow Design/Build School Welcomes Community Outreach Coordinator

Warren, VT – The Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Warren is thrilled to announce the addition of its newest member, José Galarza. José is Yestermorrow’s new Community Outreach Coordinator through the VHCB AmeriCorps program for the coming year. He will be working on helping Yestermorrow reach out to the local community, coordinate class building projects with community clients, represent Yestermorrow at conferences and events, and lead outreach and marketing efforts. On a hiatus from professional architecture practice, José arrives to the Mad River Valley after designing an assortment of iconic buildings for two well known and highly acclaimed architecture firms in Europe and the United States. Before that, he earned his Master's of Architecture degree at the University of Texas at Austin; and, concurrently apprenticed for a carpentry shop, producing high end custom pieces and collaborating with various design build and art installation projects. This work laid the foundation for his current position, where he hopes to draw interest to Yestermorrow from potential students with similar backgrounds, as well to facilitate the building of class projects with future clients. He will also be doing his part to support VHCB Americorps’ mission to enhance the welfare and stability of Vermont’s communities, environment and its citizens through education, skill development, participation, and achievement.

If you if you have any ideas about potential community projects or partnerships that the school should pursue, you can reach him at Yestermorrow: 802-496-5545 or by email at jose@yestermorrow.org.

###

Yestermorrow Design/Build School, located in Warren, Vermont, was founded in 1980 on the belief that the best built environment depends on the joint cooperation of designers, builders and homeowners. The school’s goal is to empower people to express their values and lifestyle through an integrated design/build process, and to foster a self-awareness that reconnects people to their communities, their natural environment and to each other.

Yestermorrow’s 1-day to 3-week hands on courses are taught by top architects, builders, and craftsmen from across the country. Classes are for people of all ages and experience levels, from novice to professional. Yestermorrow also offers three certificate programs: the Certificate in Sustainable Building and Design and the Natural Building Intensive and Woodworking Intensive. For more information about Yestermorrow, please visit our website at www.yestermorrow.org.