



**AmeriCorps**

# **COVID-19 Containment Response Corps Implementation Report**

AmeriCorps

October 5, 2021

# COVID Containment Response Corps Partners



**COLORADO**  
Governor Jared Polis



**COLORADO**  
Lt. Gov. Dianne Primavera



**COLORADO**  
Department of Public  
Health & Environment



**GARY  
COMMUNITY  
INVESTMENTS**



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## CCRC Grantees



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## Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of these individuals and groups in making the COVID-19 Containment Response Corps program a reality:

- Mike Johnston, Eric Parrie, and Nina Safane at Gary Community Investments
- Russ McKelvey, Sarah Hamma, Heather Baily, Chris Grano, Christine Record, and the public health professionals of the COVID-19 Containment Response Corps
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- Lieutenant Governor Primavera and the team at Serve Colorado
- The team at the Community Resource Center
- The team at Cultivate
- The team at Volunteers of America - Colorado Chapter
- The Colorado Mountain Region Office

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## Contents

Acknowledgments.....	2
Program Launch: Core Partners' Letters of Support.....	5
Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera.....	5
Jill Hunsaker Ryan, Executive Director, CDPHE.....	6
Mike Johnston, President and CEO, Gary Community Investments.....	7
Mal Coles, Acting Chief Executive Officer, AmeriCorps.....	8
Nina Jackson, CCRC Alumna and AmeriCorps Member.....	9
Executive Summary.....	10
Overview.....	11
A. COVID-19 Background.....	11
B. What is the COVID-19 Containment Response Corps?.....	12
C. Final Project Data.....	14
D. AmeriCorps 101.....	15
Phase 1: Launching the Initiative.....	18
A. COVID-19 as a National Priority.....	18
B. Initial Strengths and Weaknesses.....	18
C. Partner Reflections.....	21
Phase 2: Implementation of CCRC.....	22
A. Scaling the Program.....	22
B. Staffing for Success.....	27
C. National Civilian Community Corps Successes and Challenges.....	28
D. VISTA Summer Associates' Successes and Challenges.....	31
Phase 3: The Height of Surge Support.....	34
A. CCRC Programming during COVID-19 spike.....	34
B. RSVP Successes and Challenges.....	38
C. AmeriCorps State and National Successes and Challenges.....	41
CCRC End and Future Projects.....	45
A. Scaling the program to respond to the need.....	45
B. Examples of Early Replication.....	49
C. Impact of the program on members.....	52
How-To Guide/Collaborative Model.....	56
A. Centralized Coordination.....	56
B. Resources.....	62

C. Scaling ..... 65  
Index of Abbreviations and Key Links ..... 67



# Program Launch: Core Partners' Letters of Support

## Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera



**COLORADO**

Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera

June 7, 2021

To Whom It May Concern;

In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, national service partners in Colorado came together to determine how AmeriCorps members and volunteers could support the state's response. The resulting collaboration between multiple streams of national service, private funding, and state partners resulted in Colorado rapidly standing up a model COVID-19 Containment Response Corps (CCRC).

AmeriCorps members have played a critical role in Colorado's COVID-19 response, becoming a beacon of hope throughout the pandemic. The services provided by the CCRC have helped hungry individuals find nourishment, given families hope for the future, supported those affected by the pandemic, and prevented countless others from contracting the deadly virus. Every one of the services provided by CCRC AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Senior volunteers has helped ensure the safety of Coloradans across the state.

These individuals stepped up to provide critical support during a challenging time, ensuring that Coloradans across the state received timely information and resources to protect themselves and their loved ones. I am so inspired by their dedication to serve their neighbors and our state.

Governor Polis and I are incredibly proud of the work the CCRC has done for Colorado and are grateful for the commitment of the individual AmeriCorps members and volunteers, private partners, and staff who have helped make the program a success. AmeriCorps and its partners provided a solution to a pressing challenge. We look forward to partnering in the future to address other local challenges in our state.

Respectfully,

Dianne Primavera  
Lt. Governor of Colorado

136 State Capitol, Denver, CO 80203 | P 303.866.2471 | [www.colorado.gov/ltgovernor](http://www.colorado.gov/ltgovernor)



## Jill Hunsaker Ryan, Executive Director, CDPHE



June 14, 2021

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment  
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South  
Denver, CO 80246

To the Leadership of AmeriCorps State and National,

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you and the Colorado COVID Containment Response Corps for your contributions and commitment to the CDPHE COVID-19 pandemic response.

From early 2020 to the present day, CDPHE, alongside local public health agencies, continues to do everything possible to mitigate and prevent COVID-19 in Colorado. Several program components have helped make this possible, including dedicated teams of subject matter experts focused on priority areas such as schools, healthcare systems, long-term care facilities, and among people experiencing homelessness and incarcerated persons, to name a few. Over the course of more than a year of public health interventions, the Colorado COVID-19 Response Corps (CCRC) operated within the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) at the state level. The CCRC's case investigators and contact tracers worked to provide surge support to the local public health agencies (LPHAs) around the state.

This program was not only a unique project for AmeriCorps members to take part in, it was a different solution to contact tracing and case investigation than traditional methods. Each group of investigators brought something unique to the program: AmeriCorps Seniors had a lower than normal interview refusal rate; tech-savvy NCCC members acted as mentors for others in the program; VISTA Summer Associates remained adaptable and flexible as the program worked to meet changing needs. AmeriCorps State and National, Volunteers of America, Cultivate, Community Resource Center, and Conservation Legacy combined to support the COVID-19 response work in Colorado on many fronts.

Tens of thousands of case investigations and contact notifications were conducted by investigators from the aforementioned groups. AmeriCorps and related volunteer programs not only provided the state with a passionate, dedicated workforce, it was a cost-effective means of providing person-hours devoted to the state's response. These partnerships helped as public health had a profound impact on COVID-19 in Colorado. Investigators had conversations with people in communities across Colorado, providing preventative and sometimes life-saving information sensitively and compassionately during a time of fear.

It is with sincere appreciation that I thank all AmeriCorps partners for your service to the communities of Colorado during these challenging times.

My Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill Hunsaker Ryan".

Jill Hunsaker Ryan, MPH, Executive Director



## Mike Johnston, President and CEO, Gary Community Investments



**GARY  
COMMUNITY  
INVESTMENTS**

Working together  
for Colorado's children

June 9, 2021

Dear AmeriCorps Leadership Team,

Last spring, we looked out at the start of the pandemic and saw that countries that were successfully fighting COVID-19 had three things: 1) good social distancing rules 2) lots of testing and 3) massive, fast-acting contact tracing teams. Here in Colorado, we only had the first of those three and lacked the budget or people power for the third. We saw this as this young generation's World War II moment - a time when young volunteers could step up shoulder to shoulder and solve the world's biggest problem.

Our team reached out to national leaders at AmeriCorps with an idea: let's identify corps members whose assignments may have been shortened because of COVID and reassign them to a virtual contact tracing corps that could support Colorado. Thanks to the intrepid, entrepreneurial spirit of service we found at all levels of the AmeriCorps organization, from brand-new NCCC members to the national leaders, that effort turned out to be a historic success. Within weeks we had a team of hundreds of volunteers, young and old, trained up and serving as contact tracers.

This was a compelling example of a successful partnership between public and private entities with a shared vision, where each organization could make the best use of their respective assets and expertise. Gary Community Investments supplied the technology, logistics, and shipping, so that AmeriCorps members in states across the country and Puerto Rico could take part in the effort. AmeriCorps provided the army of diligent, thoughtful, and dedicated volunteers while state and local leaders supplied training and an organizational home for the life-saving service those volunteers delivered.

By the numbers alone, this is an incredible story: at the end of 2020, AmeriCorps members were making 1 out of every 5 contact tracing calls in Colorado, tallying thousands of outbound calls that likely prevented dozens of transmissions and outbreaks of the virus. As was the case for the Greatest Generation, the young people in this cohort distinguished themselves with selfless service in the fight to save lives. There is little doubt that these corps members saved thousands of lives in Colorado, but perhaps just as important, they built a model to prove to the rest of the country how Americans called into service can help solve even our most overwhelming national crisis.

Sincerely,

Michael C. Johnston  
President and CEO

1705 17th Street Suite 200 Denver, CO 80202 P 303.628.3800 F 303.628.3834 [www.garycommunity.org](http://www.garycommunity.org)



Mal Coles, Acting Chief Executive Officer, AmeriCorps  
June 25, 2021



Dear AmeriCorps Community,

Over the past year, as America confronted a once-in-a-century pandemic, America's spirit of service has shined brightly. In communities across the country, people of all backgrounds have united to fight this disease. Their compassion reminds us that even in our darkest hours, Americans look out for one another.

That spirit has shined especially bright in Colorado through the extraordinary efforts of the Colorado COVID Containment Response Corps (CCRC). The CCRC represents the very best of national service collaboration and has been integral to Colorado's pandemic response and recovery effort. Through the CCRC, AmeriCorps members and volunteers served more than 58,000 Coloradans through contact tracing, case investigations, and delivering test results. We are grateful to our partners at the State of Colorado, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Serve Colorado, and Gary Community Investments for their belief in this idea and their support in implementing the project.

To our AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers, we thank you for answering the call to serve and making a difference in the lives of your fellow Coloradans. In the face of a devastating public health crisis, you stepped forward to be part of the solution. Service in response to disasters or emergencies is never routine, even more so with a global pandemic. There is always an element of the unknown, of persevering in the face of adversity, of "building the airplane while you fly it." All of you rose to the challenge and met this moment.

The service you gave not only supported the people of Colorado, it helped grow our national understanding of how to respond effectively to this crisis. The CCRC model was replicated in other communities across the United States and is informing the development of a new Public Health AmeriCorps. You demonstrated the critical role of national service in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic - a fight we are still deeply engaged in. As our nation grapples with this crisis, AmeriCorps will continue to be on the frontlines getting things done to support vaccination, address learning loss, tackle the growing hunger crisis, and help communities build back better.

For decades, national service has engaged Americans of all backgrounds in tackling our toughest challenges, uniting people to work together for the common good. Time and time again, we have seen that when our nation invests in national service, we all win. Together with our thousands of community partners, AmeriCorps will continue to engage dedicated individuals in making our nation more fair, equitable, and united.

Yours in Service,

Mal Coles  
Acting Chief Executive Officer  
AmeriCorps

## Nina Jackson, CCRC Alumna and AmeriCorps Member

The COVID Containment Response Corps consists of dedicated individuals from all over the country who are doing their part to stop the spread of COVID-19... I am a Case Investigator and Contact Tracer. I talk to people in counties all over the state. I have been given a unique opportunity to talk to people I may never have interacted with outside of this. Although I am only on the phone for a limited amount of time, I often befriend them and very frequently I enjoy their company.

Prior to this work, my experience in the pandemic was very individual. I had to face my own troubles and challenges. I was not able to truly grasp the experiences of others. Now I have this chance to see firsthand just how much this situation is affecting people. I am there to offer my assistance, provide information and ease some of their concerns. There is often a mutual understanding between me and the person I call. We recognize that of course this situation is not great, but at least we both acknowledge that there is someone on... the other line who can empathize and relate to these struggles.

This job has been meaningful to me because it has broadened my community in a time of isolation and social distancing. Those phone calls whether they are good, bad, funny, sad, painful or encouraging have shown me a humanity that is unique and honest. They have helped me see what a community is willing to do to help their neighbor. It has shown me whatever adversity people face, there is always someone there to lend a helping hand. There truly is a universality to the human condition and this job has given me optimism in the most unlikely of circumstances.

I hope that once this pandemic has passed and we return to the way things once were, that I keep in mind the goodness that exists not only in Colorado, but all over the country. This time working for the CCRC has shown me that you do not have to look far for kind people. I hope I can surround myself with the people who have shown up, done their part, and helped put an end to this pandemic once and for all.

Sincerely,

*Nina Jackson*

AmeriCorps State and National member, Conservation Legacy  
Case Investigator and Contact Tracer serving in CCRC  
Letter originally published for CL network newsletter

## Executive Summary

CCRC is a group of AmeriCorps<sup>1</sup> members and AmeriCorps Senior volunteers who served as case investigators or contact tracers for the State of Colorado during the COVID-19 pandemic. A memorandum of understanding between AmeriCorps, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Serve Colorado - the Governor's Commission on Community Service, and COVID Check Colorado, LLC (CCC) was signed on July 1, 2020. This group of partners is referred to as the Colorado COVID Recovery Program.

At the time of this report, data on all AmeriCorps members' and AmeriCorps Senior volunteers' accomplishments through CCRC is available for July 2020 through May 2021. We can summarize these efforts best through case investigation/contact tracing quantifiable data provided by CDPHE. The best quantifiable data for case investigation/contact tracing include cases investigated/interviewed, contacts notified/traced, COVID test results delivered by phone, and estimated total individuals served.

Through their contributions to CCRC, AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers completed 17,629 case investigations, 7,635 through contact tracing, and an approximate 32,803 test results delivered (out of approximately 67,500 calls attempted). These efforts provided thousands of Coloradans with the information and resources they needed to understand their potential to spread COVID-19 and remain quarantined/isolated.

The impact of CCRC, like the impact of national service, is deeply profound and personal to each individual who serves. Members served during a time when their country needed them most. Although their service may have been mentally, emotionally, or physically challenging, the impact of their service was lifesaving.

The program also exceeded expectations as a pathway to employment for the members and volunteers who served, from early summer 2020 to the project's wind-down phase. Roughly 934 members and volunteers served with CCRC in some capacity since the program's inception. Of those 934, 84 former CCRC members and volunteers were hired to continue case investigation/contact tracing. This amounts to 11% who gained direct employment due to their service experience in CCRC.

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<sup>1</sup> AmeriCorps is the operating name of the Corporation for National and Community Service

## Overview

### A. COVID-19 Background

COVID-19 is caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2, a virus in humans causing respiratory illness which can be spread from person-to-person.<sup>2</sup>

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted from person to person through respiratory droplets. These droplets are released when someone with COVID-19 sneezes, coughs, or talks. Infectious droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. A wide range of symptoms for COVID-19 have been reported. These include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, headache, nasal congestion or runny nose, muscle or body aches, sore throat, new loss of smell or taste, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.<sup>3</sup>

COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China on December 31, 2019.<sup>4</sup> By January 11, 2020, China had reported its first COVID-19 related death.<sup>5</sup> On January 21, the first case in the United States was reported in Seattle, Washington.<sup>6</sup> By January 30, the World Health Organization declared a global health emergency.<sup>7</sup> On February 29, 2020, the first reported death due to coronavirus in the United States occurred near Seattle, Washington.<sup>8</sup>

Colorado first reported eight COVID-19 cases on March 6, 2020.<sup>9</sup> On March 10, 2020, Governor Jared Polis declared a State of Emergency in response to COVID-19, stating, “We will continue to be proactive and working around the clock to protect public health and safety with an eye towards preventing the need for more drastic measures that result in social disruption.”<sup>10</sup>

Governor Polis would issue more than 100 executive orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic between March and June 2020. These orders addressed everything from evictions and housing assistance to relaxed healthcare worker standards, requiring masks for certain workers, canceling in-person school instruction, and suspending marriage license requirements.

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<sup>2</sup> [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> [A Timeline of the Coronavirus Pandemic, New York Times](#)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Data Tracker](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Gov. Polis Provides Update on State’s Response to COVID-19](#)

By October 2021, Colorado had over 684,000 confirmed cases, the United States had reported 43.9 million confirmed cases, and over 4.55 million deaths had been confirmed globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

## B. What is the COVID-19 Containment Response Corps?

Testing and case investigation/contact tracing were used early during the pandemic to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Case investigation requires public health staff to partner with a patient to recall all recent close contacts during the patient's infectious period, as well as instruct the patient in effective isolation strategies. Staff then start the contact tracing process by reaching out to those individuals who have been potentially exposed to notify them of their possible exposure, instruct them in effective quarantine strategies, and provide resources including education, information, and support. This knowledge helps individuals understand their risk, how to monitor themselves for illness and how to isolate and quarantine themselves from others until the infection period has passed.

According to the CDC, "Case investigation and contact tracing is a specialized skill. To be done effectively, it requires people with the training, supervision, and access to social and medical support for patients and contacts. Requisite knowledge and skills for case investigators and contact tracers include, but are not limited to:

- An understanding of patient confidentiality, including the ability to conduct interviews without violating confidentiality (e.g., to those who might overhear their conversations)
- Understanding of the medical terms and principles of exposure, infection, infectious period, potentially infectious interactions, symptoms of disease, pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic infection
- Excellent and sensitive interpersonal, cultural sensitivity, and interviewing skills such that they can build and maintain trust with patients and contacts
- Basic skills of crisis counseling, and the ability to confidently refer patients and contacts for further care if needed
- Resourcefulness in locating patients and contacts who may be difficult to reach or reluctant to engage in conversation
- Understanding of when to refer individuals or situations to medical, social, or supervisory resources
- Cultural competency appropriate to the local community"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [World Health Organization COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

<sup>12</sup> [CDC Case Investigation and Contact Tracing: Part of a Prolonged Approach to Fight the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

CCRC is a group of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Senior volunteers who served as investigators for the State of Colorado during the COVID-19 pandemic.

AmeriCorps supported this effort by redeploying AmeriCorps members in the NCCC program and providing nearly \$2 million in federal funding for new AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service To America positions, AmeriCorps VISTA summer associate positions, and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer roles. The project initially included an estimated 300 AmeriCorps members from NCCC's Southwest Region Campus, 350 AmeriCorps summer associates in the VISTA program hosted by the Community Resource Center and Conservation Legacy, and 200 AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers managed by Cultivate and Volunteers of America Colorado.

A memorandum of understanding between AmeriCorps; CDPHE; Serve Colorado (the Governor's Commission on Community Service), and COVID Check Colorado, LLC;<sup>13</sup> was signed on July 1, 2020:

1. Providing national service members and volunteers for project placement under CDPHE's supervision to provide contact tracing services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Providing any compensation or stipends for volunteers through AmeriCorps' agreements with volunteers and members.
3. Confirming that AmeriCorps members and volunteers had an adequate remote workspace from which they can perform contact tracing services, that will protect confidential information from disclosure.
4. Coordinating for the provision of technical resources for AmeriCorps members and volunteers, such as computers.
5. Taking appropriate administrative action for volunteers who either did not meet CDPHE's background check requirements, or if an AmeriCorps member in the NCCC or VISTA summer programs had been reported by CDPHE to have performance concerns.

B. CDPHE was responsible for the following:

1. Conducting the background checks required by CDPHE for all AmeriCorps members and volunteers participating in response activities.
2. Onboarding and providing supervision and coordinating training for the AmeriCorps members and volunteers. Onboarding required completion of the CDPHE onboarding process, including any necessary forms and agreements. Training included CDPHE compliance training, contact tracer training, confidentiality and privacy training, cyber security training, and any other CDPHE-required training for AmeriCorps members and volunteers.

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<sup>13</sup> COVID Check Colorado, LLC (or CCC) and its staff is also referred to throughout this report by the name of its parent organization, "GCI" or Gary Community Investments.

3. Providing connectivity to any necessary CDPHE IT systems or web-based solutions to allow the AmeriCorps members and volunteers to access and store contact tracing information acquired in the course of their volunteer duties. This included ensuring eVPN access to CDPHE systems for any AmeriCorps members or volunteer whose role required such access as determined by CDPHE. CDPHE also coordinated any necessary training on the technology for the AmeriCorps members and volunteers.
4. Limiting the work of AmeriCorps members and volunteers to exclusively remote work, with no authorization to travel to perform contact tracing services or to meet in person with cases or contacts under investigation.
5. Reporting to AmeriCorps any concerns about volunteer performance that could result in AmeriCorps taking administrative action.
6. Providing aggregate program data to AmeriCorps as agreed upon by the Parties as required for AmeriCorps reporting purposes.
7. Ensuring in partnership with the Governor's Office of Information Technology that technological resources meet the Colorado Information Security Policies or other applicable laws or policies.

C. Serve Colorado was responsible for the following:

1. Creating and maintaining an online landing page for national service opportunities within Colorado and facilitating recruitment for these opportunities.

D. CCC was responsible for the following:

1. Providing technology resources for activities under this agreement.
2. Facilitating public awareness of the effort to drive recruitment and general public awareness.

E. Representatives of AmeriCorps, CDPHE, Serve Colorado and CCC met with agreed-to frequency to ensure proper coordination and develop new plans for the involvement of AmeriCorps members and volunteers as appropriate.

F. Where possible, AmeriCorps, CDPHE, Serve Colorado and CCC shared data regarding the activities for the purpose of improving operational effectiveness.

### C. Final Project Data

At the time of this report, data on all AmeriCorps members' and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers' accomplishments through CCRC is available for July 2020 through May 2021. We can summarize these efforts best through quantifiable case investigation/contact tracing data provided by CDPHE.<sup>14</sup> The best quantifiable data for case investigation/contact tracing include: cases investigated/interviewed,

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<sup>14</sup>[CCRC Accomplishments](#)

contacts notified/traced, COVID test results delivered by phone, and estimated total individuals served. There are some caveats to the quantity of test results delivered and individuals served, as these numbers require in-depth analysis to attribute to various AmeriCorps parties' accomplishments.

CCRC is part of the larger CDPHE COVID-19 Response Program, which includes paid investigators (with CDPHE and Optimize Manpower Solutions) and Colorado School of Public Health students in addition to AmeriCorps members and volunteers. Although these other groups of professionals do case investigation/contact tracing work for the State of Colorado, their contributions will be excluded to focus on AmeriCorps' contributions. The COVID test results were delivered by teams at the State Lab composed of a mixture of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers and CDPHE employees. After AmeriCorps Seniors were onboarded and finished training, a handful of volunteers found case investigation/contact tracing consistently challenging. CDPHE supervisors asked those struggling if they would stay on if they only had to deliver test results (a much more straightforward task). Many agreed and CDPHE formed two teams of AmeriCorps Seniors who were permanently assigned to the state lab teams. From September 2020 onward, these two teams of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers completed the majority of test result calls. In talking with former CCRC Program Manager Heather Baily, AmeriCorps ascertained that the following formula could be used to determine the total number of instances of health intervention by members and volunteers: cases + contacts + 75% of the total test results delivered.

Through their contributions to CCRC, AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers provided an estimated 58,067 instances of health intervention. 17,629 were served through case investigations, 7,635 through contact tracing, and an approximate 32,803 through test results delivered (out of approximately 67,500 calls attempted).

## D. AmeriCorps 101

### AmeriCorps State and National<sup>15</sup>

AmeriCorps State and National programs seek to address critical community needs in areas such as education, public safety, health, and the environment. Serve Colorado administers Colorado's AmeriCorps state grants, funding organizations to administer evidence-based direct service programs addressing local priorities with AmeriCorps grant funding.<sup>16</sup> AmeriCorps directly funds AmeriCorps national direct programs where high-capacity organizations place AmeriCorps members at host sites nationwide to address community challenges. Funding for AmeriCorps state

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<sup>15</sup> [AmeriCorps State and National Fit Finder](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Serve Colorado](#)



programming in Colorado comes from two sources: direct funding provided to the state to run its “formula” grants process, and federal funding available in the “competitive” national grant competition.

Formula funds are distributed to states through a population-based formula allocation. Serve Colorado determines the funding priorities for the state in awarding these grant funds. In addition to granting formula funds allocated to Colorado, Serve Colorado also sends strong state grant applicants for competitive federal funding. Successful competitive applications then increase the resources and overall AmeriCorps presence in the state.

### **AmeriCorps VISTA**<sup>17</sup>

AmeriCorps VISTA seeks to eradicate poverty by building the capacity of our nation’s nonprofits and public agencies. AmeriCorps members provide indirect service by creating or expanding programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty. Each member makes a yearlong, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. About 8,000 AmeriCorps VISTA members are placed each year in more than 1,100 projects in low-income communities around the country. The AmeriCorps Mountain Region office places approximately 130 AmeriCorps VISTA members in projects across Colorado annually.

AmeriCorps members commit to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency to alleviate poverty and build capacity of host organizations, while improving literacy, health services, economic development; and serving low-income communities. The AmeriCorps VISTA summer associate program offers individuals the opportunity to become engaged in a community through an existing AmeriCorps VISTA project for eight, nine, or ten weeks during the summer starting in May and ending early September.

### **AmeriCorps NCCC**<sup>18</sup>

AmeriCorps NCCC is a full-time, team-based, residential program for young adults aged 18-24 that strengthens communities and develops leaders through national service. Teams of eight to ten members complete multiple projects during their ten-month service term. As a residential program, NCCC provides members with housing, transportation, uniforms, and meals.

The AmeriCorps NCCC Southwest Regional Campus, based in Aurora, Colo., annually deploys more than 300 members throughout a nine-state region.

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<sup>17</sup> [AmeriCorps VISTA Fit Finder](#)

<sup>18</sup> [AmeriCorps NCCC Fit Finder](#)

### AmeriCorps Seniors<sup>19</sup>

AmeriCorps Seniors connects Americans aged 55 and over to service opportunities where their skills, knowledge, and experience can make a lasting impact in their community. The Foster Grandparent, RSVP, and Senior Companion programs empower over 200,000 seniors annually to serve their communities. The AmeriCorps Mountain Region Office administers over 4,500 AmeriCorps Senior volunteers to serve Colorado in many capacities including as mentors, companions to independent living, and in areas such as retrofitting housing to enable accessibility for older adults and others.

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<sup>19</sup> [AmeriCorps Seniors](#)



## Phase 1: Launching the Initiative

### A. COVID-19 as a National Priority

Since the start of the pandemic, AmeriCorps has stood at the ready to support COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, particularly in underserved communities and communities hit hardest by the pandemic. Working with numerous streams of service and grantees, the COVID-19 Containment Response Corps is an example of how AmeriCorps has played and continues to play a pivotal role in responding to the immediate crises and other challenges resulting from the pandemic. AmeriCorps members and volunteers supported contact tracing; food distribution to communities, schools, and vulnerable seniors; students' academic success and personal well-being in both remote and in-person school environments; and wellness checks for homebound individuals. When vaccines became available, AmeriCorps members and volunteers assisted with vaccination efforts, including aiding with transportation and the efficiency of vaccination site operations.

AmeriCorps also provided flexibility to grantees and sponsors while ensuring AmeriCorps members and volunteers continued to receive stipends, living allowances, and education awards, as determined by program structure. AmeriCorps remains committed to helping communities combat COVID-19 and respond to other public health needs.

### B. Initial Strengths and Weaknesses

#### Strengths

##### *Shared Focus and Approach*

From the first discussion between Gary Community Investments and AmeriCorps on potentially constructing a national service response to COVID-19 in Colorado on May 6, 2020, to the day the collaboration was formalized into an MOU on July 1, 2020, the culture and DNA of the program were formed. Through daily coordination and planning calls between MOU signatories, those responsible for building the Colorado COVID Recovery Program embraced a shared focus; tackling COVID-19. Similarly, partners shared understanding the work would have to be pursued in an iterative manner. While national service has a long rich history in disaster response and recovery work, never before had national service been called on to respond to a global pandemic. As COVID-19 evolved across the world and in Colorado, so did the needs of CDPHE and CCRC, how members and volunteers were trained, and how MOU leaders worked with one another to ensure Colorado was receiving the best possible assistance from national service.

##### *Technology*

While AmeriCorps provided people-power, Gary Community Investments<sup>20</sup> provided the technology that enabled members to work remotely. This included providing service members Chromebooks, headsets, and, in some cases, personal hotspots to ensure members were able to connect to systems from remote locations. Without this necessary resource, many AmeriCorps members and volunteers would not have been able to participate in the program.

### *Training*

While the training for investigators was still in its development and refinement phase, many pre-existing trainings were repurposed for this program including Mental Health First Aid, Cultural Competency, De-escalation training, and Risk Communication. Johns Hopkins also released a free COVID-19 training through Coursera that all AmeriCorps members and volunteers completed to familiarize themselves with the more technical aspects of COVID-19 and how case investigation/contact tracing could help address the pandemic.

### *Trust Amongst the Partners*

Many of the key partners in the Colorado COVID Recovery Program had a pre-existing relationship. John Kelly, the current executive director of Serve Colorado, had served as deputy chief of staff at AmeriCorps. Antonio Mendez, deputy regional director for programming at the AmeriCorps NCCC southwest region, previously served as executive director of Serve Colorado. Paul Brown, who served as acting executive director capacity before John Kelly's tenure, had worked with Antonio for years. Ken Goodson, AmeriCorps NCCC director, previously served as the region director of AmeriCorps NCCC southwest region before assuming his role. Mike Johnston, president and CEO of Gary Community Investments, served as a Teach for America corps member and had spoken at several AmeriCorps NCCC events when he served as State Senator in the Colorado Legislature. Dan Dunlap, deputy regional administrator of the AmeriCorps NCCC south central region, was also engaged during the launch phase and had previously worked with Antonio and Ken on several projects.

Each of these partners had attended and spoken at each other's events (AmeriCorps NCCC Graduations, Serve Colorado swearing-in ceremonies, etc.), collaborated on previous programs ("1A" affordable housing initiative, Tax Help Colorado, etc.), and had built a solid foundation for national service in Colorado. This foundation was critical during the project's difficult moments, allowing the partners to draw on their previous experiences together to find innovative, new solutions.

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<sup>20</sup> GCI (named in the MOU as CCC or COVID Check Colorado, LLC), is the philanthropic organization that donated and delivered necessary project technology to members and volunteers (mobile hotspots, Chromebooks, headsets).

### *Political Support*

CCRC benefitted from consistent and engaged support of political leaders at the state and federal level. Examples include:

- Governor Polis and Lt. Governor Primavera conducted press conferences to announce the partnership and used their positions to raise awareness of the partnership statewide.
- Lt. Governor Primavera participated in the virtual MOU signing on July 1, 2020, along with AmeriCorps then CEO Barbara Stewart.
- U.S. Senator Michael Bennet recorded a public service announcement to bolster recruitment efforts for members and volunteers.
- U.S. Congresswoman Diana DeGette recorded a thank you video for AmeriCorps members volunteers for the program's six-month anniversary celebration, as well as a video to the AmeriCorps staff in Colorado who helped create the program.
- U.S. Congressman Ed Perlmutter conducted an interview with an AmeriCorps VISTA summer associate member from his congressional district as part of his "Local Heroes" series.

Staff from U.S. Congressman Perlmutter and U.S. Congresswoman DeGette participated in both AmeriCorps VISTA summer associate graduations and the virtual MOU signing.

### **Challenges**

The phrase, "building the plane as we fly it" was a common refrain during the first few months of CCRC project. This novel use of AmeriCorps members in case investigation/contact tracing work posed many challenges. Although CDPHE had created - case investigation/contact tracing program materials and had equipped CU School of Public Health students to do the work, they had not been scaffolded to apply in an AmeriCorps context. There were also challenges delineating who in CCRC should respond to identified cases as paid staff needed to make calls to earn their pay. AmeriCorps members, in turn, waited for all paid staff to be assigned a case before stepping in.

Training members posed a challenge early due to limited training availability and the shorter nature of AmeriCorps NCCC's service terms (eight to 12 weeks). AmeriCorps members had to complete online modules as part of their training that they could complete at their own pace. A "bottleneck" of training occurred as members also had to complete a live, instructor-led skills-based practice session that included "observed interactions" but there were only so many members who could be trained on a weekly basis.

A number of administrative hurdles also were addressed early in the project. AmeriCorps members had to register with CDPHE to receive a state email to register in case investigation/contact tracing software and to conduct CCRC business.

AmeriCorps staff had to navigate liability complexities around the technology that GCI was providing CCRC. Finally, CCRC ramped up during the end of NCCC's Southwest Region's Class 26A timeline. The idea of extending team leaders for a few more months so that they could continue beta testing CCRC processes and software was explored by regional and headquarters staff of AmeriCorps NCCC. Ultimately, not enough team leaders expressed interest in the extension and the idea was abandoned.

### C. Partner Reflections

Interest in studying CCRC began early, with a document produced by the Office of Field Liaison at AmeriCorps headquarters<sup>21</sup> to study how the initiative got off the ground. Qualitative information was solicited from all the major partners involved in setting up and funding the collaboration, as well as those who administered and stood up the first streams of service on the project. Leadership from the following organizations provided their thoughts: CDPHE, AmeriCorps Office of Regional Outreach Mountain Region, GCI, AmeriCorps HQ staff, Serve Colorado, VISTA grantees (Community Resource Center and Conservation Legacy), and AmeriCorps Seniors grantees (Volunteers of America Colorado and Cultivate). The three questions below were presented to the collaboration's partners:

1. What conditions facilitated this initiative? Are they unique or could they be replicated?
2. What is the national service sweet spot for contact tracing? Anything suggesting this is not something national service should be doing?
3. What about this pilot would you be sure to do again? What would you be sure to avoid? What would you add?<sup>22</sup>

"The importance of having 'willing' partners" emerged as a recurring response to the first question. The partners in this initiative were not only willing, but also adept and familiar with national service resources."<sup>23</sup> It was noted that AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP parties had a long history of involvement with national service. Having multiple AmeriCorps alumni on staff served to increase organizational awareness and interest in utilizing national service at the onset of the pandemic.

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<sup>21</sup> This qualitative report's principal author was Laura Heufner of OFL. She analyzed partner insights and available data (as of early September 2020) to identify common trends and themes. The lens was not only CCRC-specific, but aimed to provide "lessons learned and suggestions for potential replication of other multi-partner and multi-national service program responses to priority community needs" (as quoted by Ken Goodson in an email to Sam Twynam on 6/17/21).

<sup>22</sup> [Qualitative Feedback on the Colorado COVID-19 Recovery Pilot Program prepared for the CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation](#), 9/11/20, Page 1. This document was produced for ORE in September 2020 (utilizing the qualitative feedback of major partners to understand the CO COVID Recovery Program).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* Pages 9-10.

Respondents also noted the critical importance of Gary Community Investments as a private philanthropic partner (without which the tech for the project would have been out of reach). Partners' flexibility, creativity, can-do attitude, and knowledge of national service were all heavily emphasized as factors that allowed the program to pose a rapid response. In analyzing the less-replicable aspects of the project, some factors were noted as "ma[king] this initiative unique, and potentially difficult to replicate, such as the availability of VISTA resources, the strong partner in GCI, and the nature of this world-wide pandemic."<sup>24</sup>

The analysis of responses to the second question found that case investigation/contact tracing was exactly the kind of work that can and should be done by national service in Colorado during COVID-19. Respondents emphasized the extremely high need of the project and the immediacy and determination the pandemic created among collaborating partners. The Qualitative Feedback report noted that "national service attracts people who are caring and want to serve, and this pandemic response has benefitted from that ethic more than from public health knowledge."<sup>25</sup> In the environment of the early pandemic, stakeholders agreed that the work was a "good fit for national service members." Community Resource Center's member feedback also showed that members had positive experiences as investigators.

For a synopsis of the Qualitative Feedback report's findings in response to the third question, please see the How-To Guide/Collaborative Model section later in this report.<sup>26</sup> This last question speaks more to what could be improved in replication of the program, rather than how the program began.

## Phase 2: Implementation of CCRC

### A. Scaling the Program

CCRC began with four partners (CDPHE, AmeriCorps, Serve Colorado, and Gary Community Investments), one stream of service (AmeriCorps NCCC), and a small CDPHE staff for supervision and beta-testing of the program. It relied on staff and AmeriCorps members already present and directly administered by the partner

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<sup>24</sup> Id. Page 10. The importance of GCI has been emphasized. The "nature of this world-wide pandemic" is a not replicable factor that added immediacy and high need to the motivational factors for all partners. Immediate financial investment from AmeriCorps VISTA ensured that grantees had the budgets to rapidly set up a program and allowed CCRC to scale up relatively quickly.

<sup>25</sup> Id. Page 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Even Better If* sub-section.

organizations. Team leaders from NCCC tested the model while cases remained low. Next, members were added, and then members serving in AmeriCorps VISTA summer associate program came on board, bringing two grantees and the ORO Mountain Region into the project.

Planning also took on more breadth as the program continued and staff were no longer building but preparing for forecasted COVID rates and onboarding larger groups from different streams of service. The program began with, and utilized intermittently, short-term lengths for members. AmeriCorps NCCC and VISTA programs were the first waves for a reason - the eight-to-twelve week service terms made them ideal to test out the model of service. AmeriCorps NCCC and VISTA also had relatively quick turnarounds for setting up a program, making them the fastest streams to get trained on short notice. As the project grew and processes were solidified, programs with longer-term lengths were added to CCRC. AmeriCorps Seniors had no limit on how long they could serve, and indeed many volunteers remained in service until June 2021. AmeriCorps State and National also required longer-term lengths, plus a large dedication of hours per week (when compared to AmeriCorps Seniors' part-time service). CCRC program was challenged by the unpredictability of COVID-19, and case counts seemed to ramp up just in time for member number scale-downs (and vice versa); however, the small-to-large and short-to-long-term planning worked well for scaling up CCRC's capabilities and numbers.

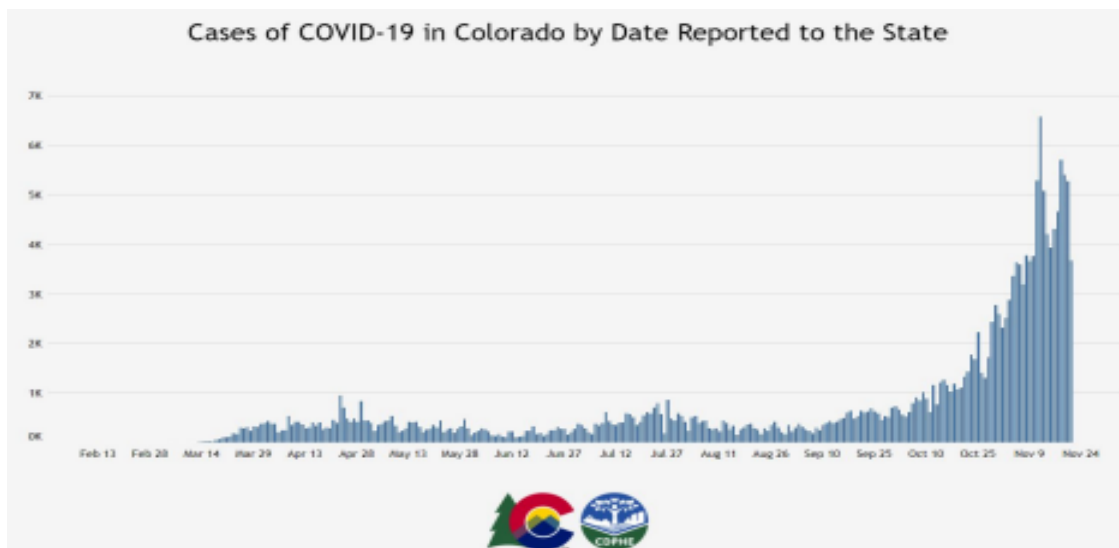
### **Summer Numbers**

AmeriCorps members became involved in CCRC beginning June 2020<sup>27</sup>. The first few months of CCRC's operation as a case investigation/contact tracing public health corps were relatively quiet, since COVID case counts in Colorado remained relatively low in the summer of 2020. CDPHE reported a seven-day positivity rate between 2.7 and 5.55% in July, August, and September 2020. During this time, CCRC attempted to "build a plane while flying it," set up a more robust surge leadership and supervisory structure, involve members and volunteers meaningfully in case investigation/contact tracing work, and streamline their trainings and onboarding.

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<sup>27</sup> We have data for member accomplishments starting in July, since the only AmeriCorps members on the project at that point (NCCC team leaders) began making calls at this time. At publication, this report is able to draw upon data for July 2020 through May of 2021.





From CDPHE’s 6-Month Report, published December 2020, the graph shows the state’s relatively low case counts through the summer months. July was a busy time for case investigators, as was the end of September (as cases ramped up toward fall).

AmeriCorps VISTA remained the largest AmeriCorps stream of service contributing to CCRC in July and August 2020. Summer Associates completed the bulk of case investigation/contact tracing in July, while AmeriCorps NCCC North Central Region onboarded its teams.<sup>28</sup> This pattern held through August, with AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program working 93% of case investigations and roughly 88% of contact notifications during that month.<sup>29</sup> However, AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program only served for 8-10 weeks and began offboarding in September; this created a sharp decline in AmeriCorps member numbers.

Program organizers aimed to fill this vacuum with alumni (returning to serve as temporary contractors and joining a larger contingency known as Optimize Manpower Solutions<sup>30</sup>) and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in the RSVP program. In September, AmeriCorps NCCC<sup>31</sup> worked approximately 11.6% of cases, AmeriCorps

<sup>28</sup> NCCC Southwest Region also offboarded its beta-testing teams of Team Leaders and on/offboarded two regular, traditional corps teams during this period (Sun 5 and 7).

<sup>29</sup> [CCRC Accomplishments](#)

<sup>30</sup> Onboarding “Optimize Manpower Solutions” (OMS) was an important milestone goal for both CDPHE and AmeriCorps. CDPHE could not directly hire many CCRC AmeriCorps alums from the summer, since CDPHE’s rules require the department to hire Colorado residents (and many VISTA and NCCC alums of the first few months of CCRC served from around the country). To retain talent and provide a pathway to employment, CDPHE hired full-time contact tracers through a temp agency. These approximately 100 contact tracing contractors (mostly AmeriCorps alumni) would go on to do the heavy lifting of CCRC after their onboarding in mid-September. Their accomplishments are not included in the cases, contacts, test results delivered, or individuals served stats shared in this report.

<sup>31</sup> Mostly North Central Region, with a minority of NCCC Southwest Region teams.

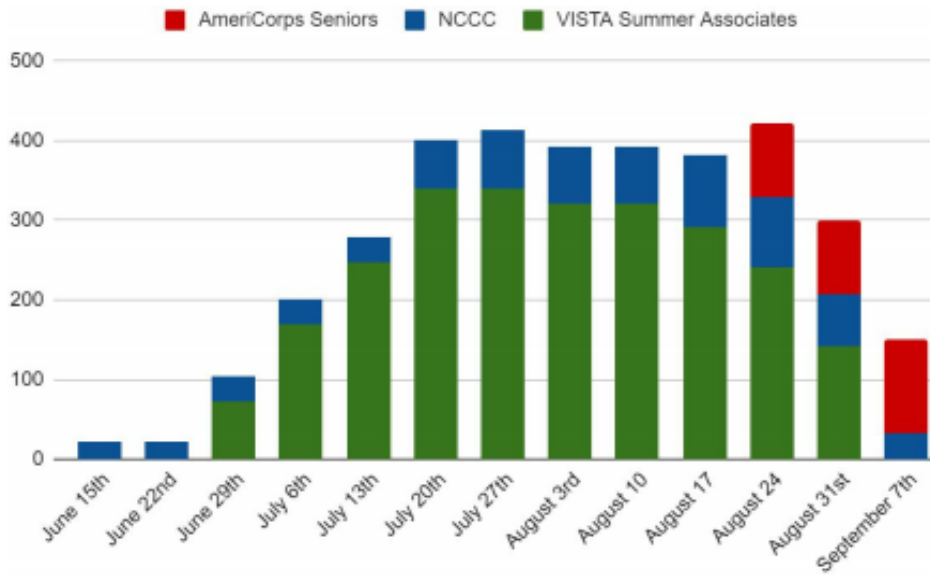
VISTA 10.3%, AmeriCorps Seniors 4.2%, and Optimize Manpower Solutions contractors a whopping 62.6%.<sup>32</sup> Contractors did the lion's share of the COVID Response's case investigation/contact tracing work. OMS would continue to shoulder case investigation/contact tracing workload throughout the duration of the Colorado COVID Recovery Program.

AmeriCorps alumni who graduated from CCRC service had a huge role in building out CCRC's staff leadership/supervisory structure during this period. CDPHE scaled up its supervisory structure by directly hiring alumni - with the largest pool of available talent coming from the ranks of AmeriCorps VISTA's summer associate program. Both Lexy Foor (AmeriCorps NCCC Southwest alumna) and Natalie Wowk (AmeriCorps VISTA alumna) would go on to become CCRC branch managers, in charge of all CCRC teams in one or more of CDPHE's five epidemiological regions. Several more would become CCRC 'Team Leads' - direct supervisors for one or more cross-stream teams of investigators.

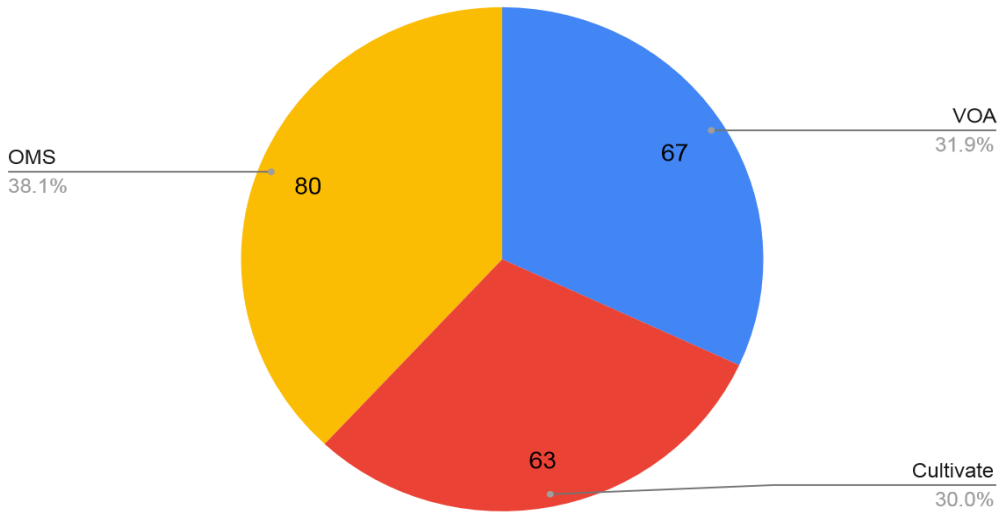
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<sup>32</sup> [CCRC Accomplishments](#). The large majority of the remaining percentage of cases was worked by Colorado School of Public Health students.

### Member Numbers/Streams, July-September 2020



### CCRC Current Makeup



Stats for above graphs

- Bar graph shows AmeriCorps parties' numbers only for June through early September.
- Pie graph shows non-CDPHE, non-CSPH parties' numbers at the end of September. This was the approximately one-week period during which AmeriCorps

Seniors was the only stream of service actively serving in CCRC. Weekly Report 9 - October 1, 2020; 130 AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers make up roughly 62% of CCRC.

#### Service Instances

July: 3,710

August: 6,404

September: 6,754

#### Cases Investigations

July: 1,132

August: 767

September: 597

#### Contact Notifications

July: 302

August: 694

September: 41

## B. Staffing for Success

In June 2020, staff from the AmeriCorps NCCC Southwest region were tasked by Gina Cross, acting director. AmeriCorps NCCC, with interviewing candidates and selecting a potential program associate to serve in an administrative support function for CCRC. While the program had been functioning well, it was understood that the success of the program ultimately required more attention than any existing staff member could provide. Sam Twynam was selected for the program associate position. Sam had a great deal of experience in national service having served as an AmeriCorps NCCC member in the Pacific Region, a Colorado Reading Corps member as part of an AmeriCorps State program, and an AmeriCorps VISTA Leader in Colorado Springs. These experiences gave Sam firsthand knowledge of the differences between the streams of service and helped him conceptualize and predict challenges before they arose. As a program associate, Sam acted as the project's primary liaison, data analyst, principal publicist, and the closest thing to a program manager that such a large and collaborative project could engage.

Sam would gain more responsibilities as the year progressed. He became the primary author of the "Colorado Contact Tracing Weekly Report," where he presented the successes and challenges of the project, noteworthy news, data summaries and more. These weekly reports were widely circulated and helped all parties keep a finger on the pulse of COVID-19 in Colorado and the current iteration of CCRC's response. In the AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps State and National successes and challenges sections of this report, the reader will notice that the budget for a dedicated program team enabled these nonprofits to be successful as grantees of

their programs. This was no less true on the AmeriCorps side, as having a dedicated “project expert” in the program associate role - with the bandwidth to take on and report project challenges - allowed other staff to continue their regular work (made more difficult during the pandemic) without loss of productivity.

Sam also facilitated the logistical component of the program, working with Gary Community Investments to ship, disperse, collect, and return tech equipment like laptops, portable hotspots, headsets, and more to campuses and programs all across the country. He would also serve as the primary liaison for the project by meeting with key stakeholders, facilitating conversations between streams of service, and providing updates to leadership when requested.

Everyone involved has seen firsthand the benefit of Sam’s involvement in the project. Many consider him the “glue” that keeps the project together and have thanked him for his outstanding service throughout.<sup>33</sup>

### C. National Civilian Community Corps Successes and Challenges

#### Successes

AmeriCorps NCCC has been touted as one of the most flexible and responsive streams of service. Given its short project terms and ability to easily redeploy, the AmeriCorps NCCC program is a natural fit in the disaster response context. While there were significant challenges throughout AmeriCorps NCCC’s involvement with the program, the implementation of CCRC program is considered a huge success for AmeriCorps NCCC.



(Gabe Cohen,  
AmeriCorps NCCC Team  
Leader)

The initial development of the project was facilitated out of the Southwest region, however every NCCC campus served on this project. North Central provided members during summer 2020, Pacific members served on the project during winter 2020, and the Southern region provided its campus to send members during its transition back into the field. This national approach ensured the Southwest region had capacity to serve other vital projects throughout its nine-state region.

Given the flexible nature of the NCCC program, staff were able to more frequently assess the needs of the program and scale participation up or down throughout

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<sup>33</sup> While Sam’s position was a temporary, one-year position, Sam will continue with the agency as he has accepted a role as Portfolio Manager in the ORO Mountain Region.

the year. While not perfectly aligned with the existing need in case investigation/contact tracing, this scaling proved invaluable to both CDPHE and NCCC. Adding to this strength, NCCC members proved to be some of the fastest to make it through CDPHE's technically rigorous trainings, beginning case investigation/contact tracing service rapidly after onboarding.<sup>34</sup>

The personal impact of participating in this program may be hard to measure but NCCC Southwest staff know many members are now considering employment in public health (including a few who have since gone on to paid roles at CDPHE) or working in disaster response and mitigation through agencies like FEMA.<sup>35</sup> To learn more about the impact of this project on various members, please see the section below entitled *"Impact of the program on the members."*

Early project development on the state side was directed by Russ McKelvey - deputy, containment program, plans at CDPHE - and Brian Wegner - administrative coordinator at Serve Colorado. AmeriCorps NCCC staff worked with Russ and Brian to finalize trainings, beta test systems, forecast potential AmeriCorps issues and troubleshoot existing ones.

### **Challenges**

Being the first stream of service to participate in CCRC posed significant challenges for AmeriCorps NCCC. The first was the member experience. AmeriCorps NCCC eligibility requirements state that members must be 18-26 years old<sup>36</sup>, be a U.S. Citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident, pass an initial drug screening test upon arrival to the program, and must be available for 10-12 months of full-time service consisting of extensive travel. AmeriCorps members in the NCCC program come from a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds. By contrast, other early investigators came from the Colorado School of Public Health where students had a broader understanding of core public health principles and were interested in making a career in the field, or from the AmeriCorps VISTA summer associate programs whose members applied specifically for the chance to serve as investigators. CDPHE supervisory staff informed NCCC that members required more supervision and felt frustrated by how little some knew about public health. It took longer to get the teams to a comfortable place and many teams reported feeling

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<sup>34</sup> It generally took NCCC members two weeks or less to finish these online trainings. This speed was informally attributed to NCCC members' youth and status as "digital natives." By contrast, some AmeriCorps Seniors took a month or more to make it through the self-paced trainings.

<sup>35</sup> One NCCC Southwest (team leader) alumna, Lexy Foor, went straight from beta-testing the case investigation/contact tracing platforms of CCRC to becoming a Branch Manager (full-time employee with CDPHE, in charge of all CCRC teams in one of Colorado's epidemiological regions).

<sup>36</sup> Traditionally members ranged from 18-24 years old, but the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act of 2020 increased the upper age limit for participation as an AmeriCorps member to 26 years old.

mentally and emotionally exhausted by the unique nature of the disaster and their service.

While this stream of service has many benefits in a disaster response context, there were still some basic requirements that posed challenges. While traditional sponsors are not required to contribute a “program match” - a requirement that every dollar from a funding source must be matched with a specific percent of the organization's own funds - they are required to provide two critical requirements for a success: 1) housing for members and 2) a work plan for them to follow.

AmeriCorps NCCC approached its partners early in the program to inquire about any housing solutions they might be able to identify. Given that members from NCCC Class 26B were in case investigation/contact tracing, and Class 27A would soon need to onboard to the program, this lack of housing caused issues with the Southwest Region Campus as COVID-19 social distancing policies limited how many members could be on campus at any given time. Serve Colorado executive director John Kelly and Gary Community Investments president and CEO Mike Johnston both explored various options from dorms at the University of Denver (which were now vacant due to the school being all-remote learning) to state-owned buildings like the Grant-Humphreys Mansion. Unfortunately, none of those housing options ever came through.

After the holiday break, some investigators would remain at their Home of Records conducting case investigation/contact tracing remotely while others would fly out to the AmeriCorps NCCC Southern Campus in Vicksburg, Miss. Those investigators discovered that the supplied hotspot technology did not have sufficient bandwidth. This led to challenges connecting with calls and dropped calls during the team’s time on the Southern campus. After troubleshooting for several weeks, NCCC invested in a signal booster/extender that was meant to address the problem.

The next big challenge was the shifting work plan for the project. The initial group of Team Leaders out of the Southwest region had served as beta testers for the case investigation/contact tracing software and for the training that CDPHE was to provide. The North Central region expressed some challenges around training and onboarding their members as there was a large group of AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program that CDPHE was prioritizing due to their shortened service commitment. This led to large periods of no service for these members throughout the summer. CDPHE requested that NCCC commit to two terms of service moving forward as they were worried the training and onboarding would be too time-intensive.. While not how NCCC traditionally operates, the Southwest region agreed to provide a stable case investigation/contact tracing volunteer force.

There were peaks and valleys throughout the year when it came to case investigation/contact tracing work availability. CDPHE expressed frustration during several instances when a peak in cases coincided with a transition or a departure of members. The Southwest region was grateful for the valleys, as it meant low numbers of COVID cases but also required the team to find ways for members to continue to acquire service hours during lulls in the project.

The addition of the AmeriCorps State and National members to the project meant reprioritizing case investigation/contact tracing to AmeriCorps State and National members and NCCC soon exited the project. NCCC shifted from case investigation/contact tracing to having members assist the Federal Emergency Management Agency in mass vaccination sites across the country.



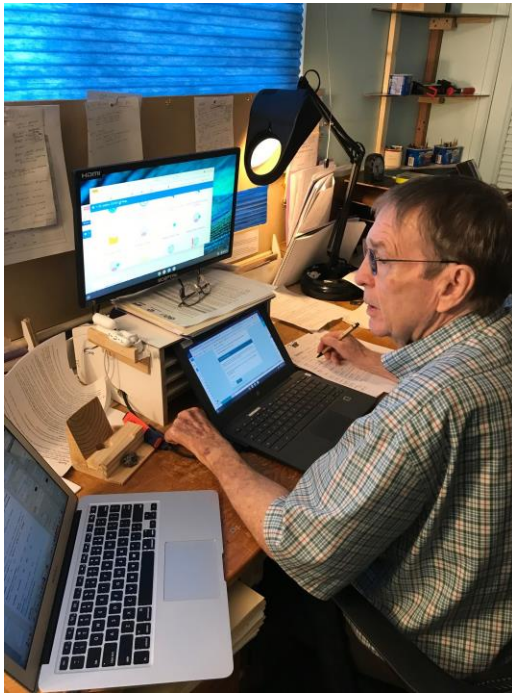
(Emily Hadsell, NCCC Corps Member)

#### D. VISTA Summer Associates' Successes and Challenges



## Successes

According to AmeriCorps VISTA grantees, a few elements helped the VISTA summer



(Gil Campbell, VISTA and AmeriCorps State and National member)

work “overnight” hours to get things processed in time.

associates program contribution get off the ground. First, Community Resource Center and Conservation Legacy were granted “no cost share” - meaning they did not need to externally fundraise to support the cost of the VISTA program. Sufficient funds were made available for grantees to hire the people they needed (recruiters, program staff, etc.) and successfully launch in a quick manner. Close collaboration between CRC and CL program staff allowed for the program, documents, and tools to be built collaboratively and personnel resources to be pooled. This collaboration allowed the two nonprofits to work through their 1,000+ applications much quicker. It should also be noted that the VISTA Member Support Unit supported the project by adjusting typical deadlines and procedures in order to get the members onboarded quickly. A lot of support was required to make the project work on a timeline that fit within VISTA regulations, including utilizing a staff person in Hawaii to

Another advantage was the remote nature of the service, allowing anyone interested in serving as an investigator to apply and participate regardless of geography. Despite a global pandemic, the work became accessible to all age groups, locations, abilities, and pre-existing conditions. The Summer Associates program’s lack of an upper age limit made it so that applicants from ages 18-80 could participate in meaningful service. VISTA’s early participation also increased associates’ chances of employment - as many of them went on to work for CDPHE directly, or on CDPHE’s OMS temp staff of investigators. This happened regardless of any public health experience previous to service with CCRC - an important “foot in the door” for AmeriCorps members.

The ebb and flow of case investigation/contact tracing work allowed summer associates to engage in a great deal of professional development, provided both by CDPHE and grantee program staff. When call volume was low, members could expand their knowledge of public health and epidemiology by completing training modules (on epidemiology, equity in public health, etc.) provided by CDPHE or the

more 'extracurricular' activities (alumni panels, leadership and expert talks, etc.) organized by grantees.

An additional success reported by grantee staff was that the VISTA program enjoyed a high retention rate after the initial onboarding period, likely due, in part, to the short service term commitment of eight-to-ten weeks. This short-term length also meant that AmeriCorps members looked for opportunities to stay on, which abounded in this early iteration of CCRC.

One final, major success was VISTA recruitment. Of all the streams of national service engaged in the effort, no program faced the challenge of greater recruitment targets (350 members), nor compressed timeframe for recruitment (approximately one month). Despite these challenges, by the end of the recruitment campaign, CRC and CL had received 1,034 applications for the 350 available positions. This recruitment success proved to be the first indicator of the strong desire of Americans to serve on the front lines of COVID recovery. A diversity group of applicants were attracted to the VISTA positions, from retired medical professionals to those who lost their job to COVID closures.

Four steps complimented CRC and CL recruitment efforts and contributed to this success.

1. Public service announcements were created by Gary Community Investments and the ORO Mountain Region in partnership with Comcast and the AmeriCorps Office of External Affairs. These PSAs engaged high profile Coloradans including Governor Polis, Lt. Governor Dianne Primavera, Denver Bronco Dalton Risner, Olympic medalist Missy Franklin, and U.S. Senator Michael Bennet. The PSAs were general in nature, making them useful to later recruitment efforts by AmeriCorps Seniors and AmeriCorps State and National.
2. CL and AmeriCorps NCCC each leveraged their robust alumni networks to amplify messaging about CCRC service opportunities.
3. An ORO Mountain Region connection with the Peace Corps created access to the Evacuated Peace Corps Volunteer network. Through this connection, bi-lingual, public health professionals became a part of the early CCRC. Several later moved into paid positions with CDPHE.
4. Finally, Serve Colorado established a single landing page for interested Americans to learn more specifics about different service opportunities in CCRC. This one-stop-shopping approach simplified national service for those who heard about the service opportunities with CCRC.

### **Challenges**

The short VISTA summer service term had its disadvantages in the eyes of the public health professionals at CDPHE. They pointed out that members were spending two to three weeks of their eight-to-ten week terms in training (without making a single call),

and the remaining five-to-eight weeks did not provide enough time for members to gain true mastery of the ins and outs of case investigation/contact tracing work.

Grantee staff reported that the equipment provided to members for use in case investigation/contact tracing posed some challenges. Each AmeriCorps member was given a Chromebook (a small laptop with an operating system that relies on an internet connection). The rigorous training put on by CDPHE tested the Chromebooks to their limits and required add-ons to run required modules. Even the most tech-savvy members found the Chromebooks difficult to operate at times. Grantees reported that the quality of calls, especially video calls, could be poor, regardless of internet quality. Although hotspots were provided to members who needed them, the hotspots relied on cellular data - a resource that remained hard to come by for members in rural locations.

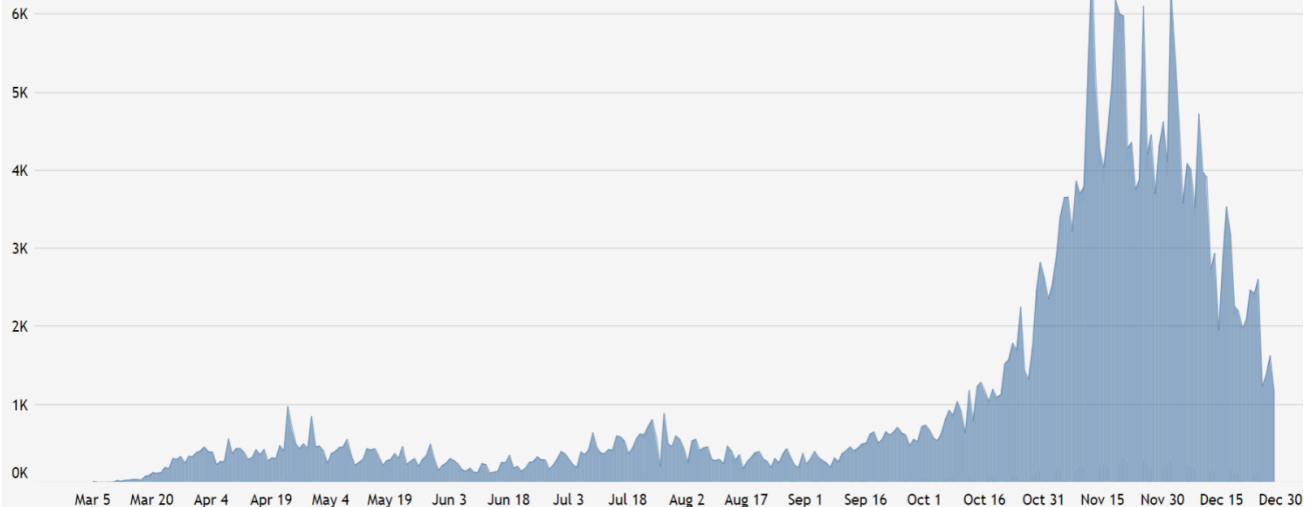
1) The ebb and flow of case investigation/contact tracing work proved a double-edged sword. CCRC was designed to operate as surge support for a system of local public health authorities who would hand over cases during a surge in COVID-19 numbers in their locality. When local public health agencies/authorities had capacity to handle their own cases, AmeriCorps members had no direct service to perform. CCRC's built-in training and data cleaning tasks only covered so much downtime, and this problem was only solved because CRC and CL had the staff capacity to create activities and events for idle members. (This is a problem plagued multiple streams at different times in the project. It wasn't unique to VISTA, but it was made worse by the consistently low case counts in Colorado during summer 2020.)

## Phase 3: The Height of Surge Support

### A. CCRC Programming during COVID-19 spike

During the 2020 fall and winter, Colorado experienced surging cases of COVID-19 and its highest average case count of the pandemic. Colorado saw its first case of the faster-spreading B.1.1.7 (Alpha) variant, received the first shipment of the Pfizer vaccine (December 14, 2020), and CDPHE reported a seven-day testing positivity rate between 5.42% and 12.88% (less at either end of this time period and spiking in mid-November). During this time, CCRC leadership tried to ramp up member/volunteer numbers after the September drop-off, ensure case investigation/contact tracing coverage during the holidays, bring on/retain two new streams of AmeriCorps service, and thank/connect members in service.

## Cases of COVID-19 in Colorado by Date Reported to the State



From Weekly Report 22, published 12/30/2020

VISTA members had offboarded from the project by early September. This “cliff” in member numbers proved to be an ongoing challenge for CDPHE as COVID-19 numbers ramped up. Leadership needed investigators as soon as possible, making the AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers some of the most valuable CCRC participants during this time. The need for trained individuals also prompted AmeriCorps NCCC (Southwest Region) to pledge more teams than had originally been committed, in spite of the logistical difficulties housing these residential teams presented. From early October to late November, NCCC Southwest brought on roughly 80 members in a mixture of remote and campus-bound waves. While grantees worked to get roughly 115 AmeriCorps Seniors through highly technical trainings, Serve Colorado worked with sub-grantees, Community Resource Center and Conservation Legacy, on the same.<sup>37</sup>

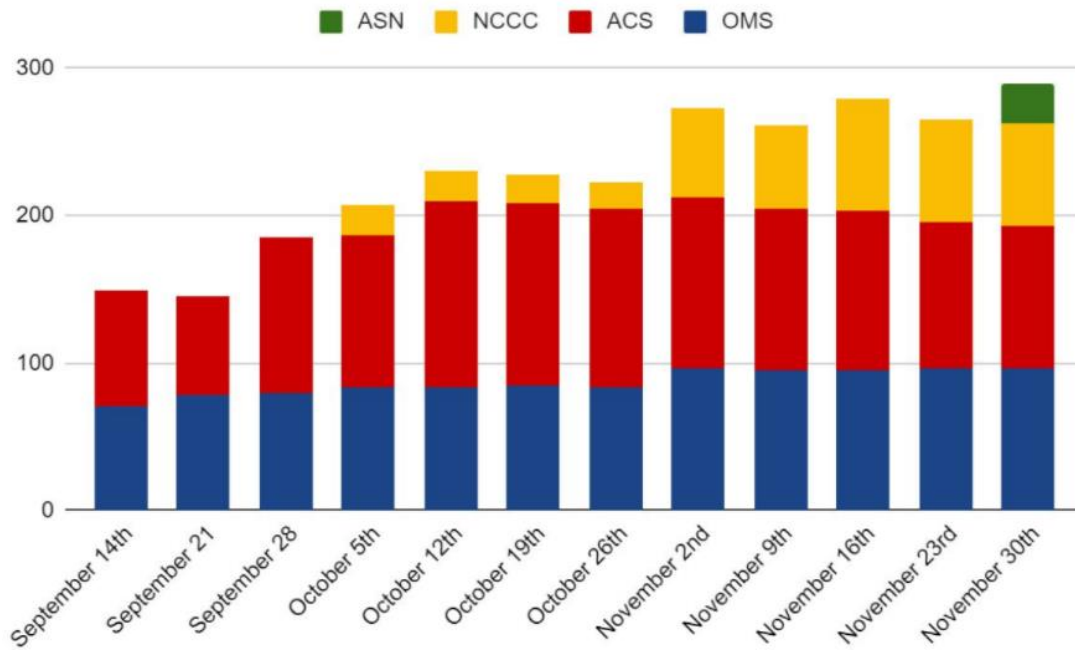
This period saw CCRC at its most productive. While a majority of the case investigation/contact tracing surge support work was done by contractors and college students, AmeriCorps teams proved to be a huge asset. All numbers below are the combined totals of AmeriCorps teams (NCCC, AmeriCorps Seniors, and AmeriCorps State and National). Individuals served = cases + contacts + .75 (test results delivered). During October, CCRC switched case investigation/contact tracing

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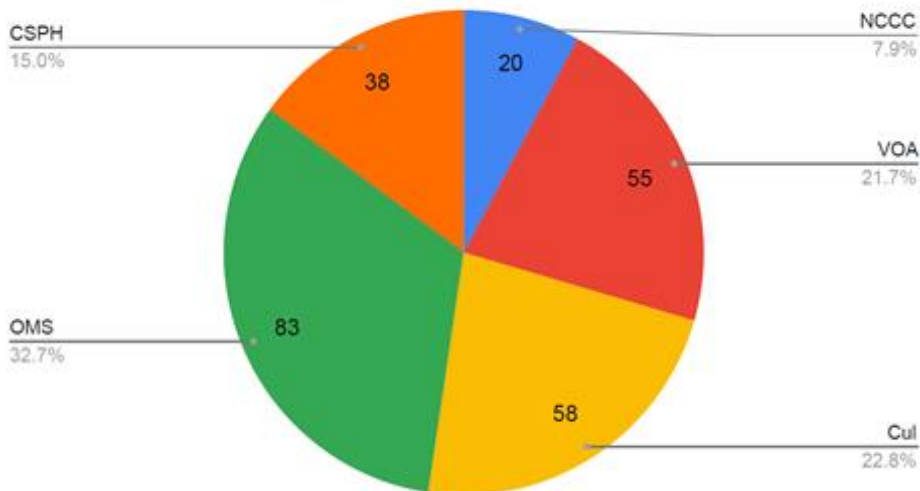
<sup>37</sup> VISTA veteran grantees from earlier in the project were brought on to recruit and bring on 50 AmeriCorps State and National members in late November and early December (with plans for 50 more in the new year).

software. The October numbers below combines totals from both software systems and corrects minor errors initially reported.

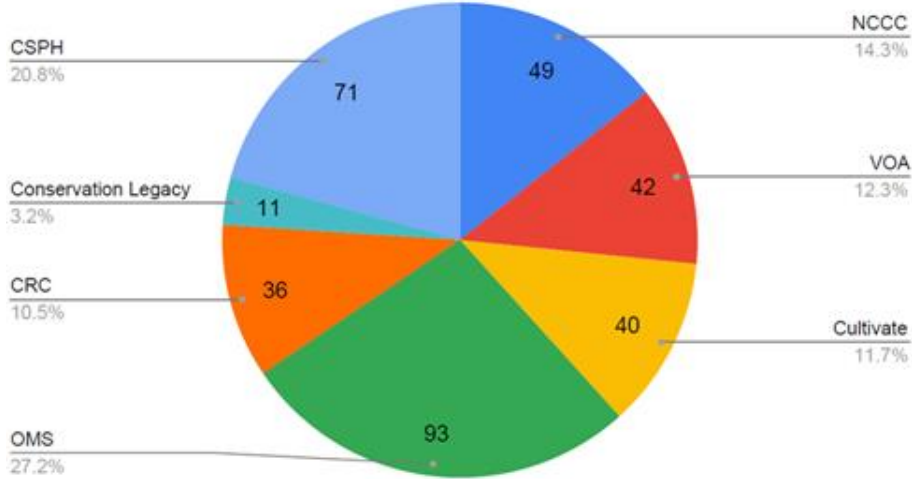
*Member Numbers/Streams, Oct-Dec 2020*



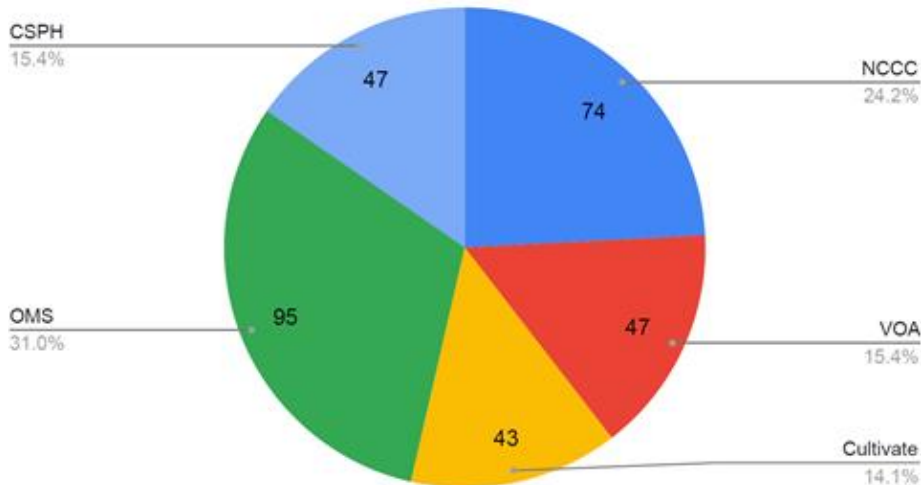
Current CCRC Makeup - October 29, 2020



Current CCRC Makeup



Current CCRC Makeup



Stats for above pie charts

- Bar graph depicts member numbers/streams for the majority of this period.
- Weekly Report 13; 10/29/20; 131 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 52.4% of CCRC.
- Weekly Report 17; 11/25/20; 164 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 53.7% of CCRC.
- Weekly Report 22; 12/30/20; 178 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 52% of CCRC.

MATCH ABOVE

October: 6,481

November: 6,318

December: 5,944

## Cases Investigations

October: 880

November: 1,376

December: 2,383

## Contact Notifications

October: 499

November: 539

December: 60

## B. RSVP Successes and Challenges

AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in the RSVP program were recruited by Volunteers of America Colorado and Cultivate grantees and brought on from late August through September 2020. Many AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers quickly resigned or took longer than CDPHE staff expected to complete a tech-heavy two-to-four week training. And, the AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers who remained after training stood as the sole, active AmeriCorps participants from September 25 until NCCC teams cleared training on October 19. Though their initial onboarding was rougher than expected, AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers remained a useful asset to CDPHE, which considered their part-time contribution to be “extra” to the regular, 40-hour contributions of other case investigators.

### Successes

In contrast to a stream of service like AmeriCorps NCCC, the AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program attracted a fair number of retired doctors and nurses, eager to help in Colorado’s COVID-19 response. Additionally, since the RSVP program provides more of a standard “volunteer” experience (uncompensated, fewer hours/week, a dedication of spare time, flexible scheduling), volunteers were able to serve irregular hours (weekends, etc.) if they felt inclined.



(Pat Taylor, VISTA Member and AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteer)

Some volunteers consistently found case investigation/contact tracing work to be too intense for the time/attention they had to spend, so CDPHE turned this challenge of the stream into a strength. They created two teams solely dedicated to the State Lab, whose task was to call people who were given free COVID-19 tests at state-run testing sites and deliver their test results over the phone. It's estimated that these teams - the self-proclaimed "COVID Killers" - made an estimated 67,500 call attempts to deliver an approximately 32,803 test results to Coloradans and people traveling from out-of-state who received testing in Colorado. This small group of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers greatly increased the number of individuals served by the larger project because, in contrast with a case investigation (which can take a couple of days for a single case and longer if they have many

contacts), test result calls were quickly completed to many individuals.

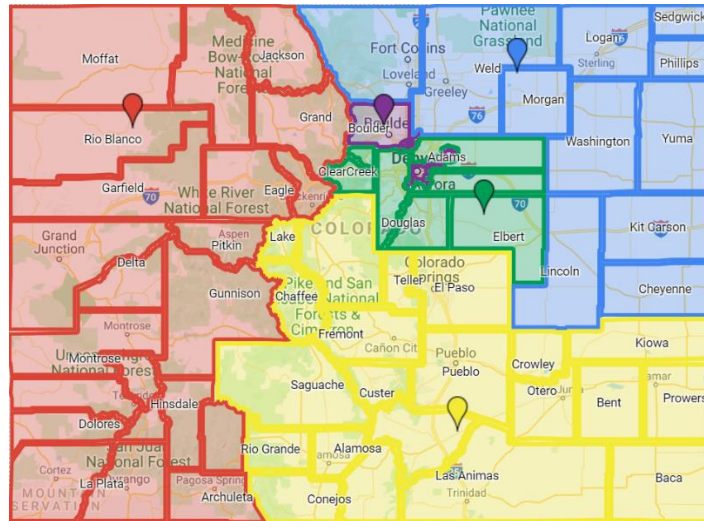
AmeriCorps Seniors, when compared with other participants, had the lowest "refusal rate." As investigators, members ask personal and detailed questions about a COVID-19 positive person's activities during their infectious period. These conversations can take hours and cases often resist the probing nature of the investigator's line of questioning. When CDPHE compared refusal rates among different participant teams in September and October 2020, they found that AmeriCorps Seniors were more successful in completing some or all the investigation. The rate of interview refusal for NCCC and VISTA at the time varied between 8% and 12% (varying between the subset and/or grantee who onboarded them); during the same period, AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers' refusal rate was between 3% and 7% (Weekly Report 16). In the words of CDPHE, this "demonstrat[es] that they are great at making connections with those they call" (CDPHE Six-Month Report).

### Challenges

Some of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers' strengths proved to be double-edged swords. Unlike AmeriCorps NCCC or AmeriCorps State and National, volunteers had no obligation to serve 40-hour weeks, instead hovering in the 5-20 hours per week range. AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers are used to the RSVP program having flexible schedules, giving the time you have to your community project. This was an immediately flagged problem area for CDPHE employees, trying to build week-long coverage of case investigation/contact tracing surge support in each of the state's five epidemiological regions (see map below). Grantees, CDPHE, and ORO Mountain



Region worked together to forge more committed schedules for volunteers, so that their supervisors would know when to depend on their help. However, the loose nature of the AmeriCorps RSVP program persisted as a minor issue. CCRC and grantees had to go the extra mile to encourage AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers through both the stressful times and the doldrums. This again goes back to the “volunteer” mentality; grantee staff noted, as a general observation from running AmeriCorps RSVP programs in the past, that if service was too stressful, or volunteers did not feel there was a currently compelling need to serve, volunteers tended to resign.



An early map of CCRC’s five epidemiological (“epi”) regions across the state of Colorado. Each team, which could consist of multiple streams of service, public health students, and contact tracing temp staff, was assigned a region, a supervisor, and a schedule. This scheduling ensured that each region had adequate case *investigation/contact tracing* coverage every day of the week, meaning that a team might serve Wednesday-Sunday

On top of this, some AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers experienced generational challenges while volunteering in a completely remote and technology-dependent role. For some, the technology learning during the first two, intense weeks of onboarding was too steep. AmeriCorps Seniors saw its highest, most concentrated rates of attrition in the first weeks of volunteer participation. This challenge fostered some collaborative and innovative solutions, as these volunteers were highly valuable to CCRC, who was facing a “cliff” in member numbers after the offboarding members of the VISTA program.

ORO Mountain Region approached Sam Twynam with the idea of connecting members from NCCC with AmeriCorps Seniors who needed technology-specific help. Sam worked with two AmeriCorps NCCC teams to create a roster of “on-call” hours, AmeriCorps member names, and phone numbers. The “office hours” document was sent to grantees and CCRC Team Leads who then shared it with their

AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. AmeriCorps members in the NCCC program were able to help AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers with their Chromebook, Google suite, hotspot, and other basic technical challenges that didn't require the help of CDPHE's IT department or a public health professional like CCRC Team Lead.

This connection between AmeriCorps Seniors and AmeriCorps NCCC proved to be successful and retention rates vastly improved in the third cohort of AmeriCorps Seniors, who joined in September, when the office hours were in full swing. CDPHE also made efforts to simplify their training for a less tech-savvy audience, so no single element can be heralded as responsible for this improvement. The columns below show the improved retention rates over the course of the three cohorts, reported in Weekly Report ten in early October. However, perhaps the most significant legacy of this cross-stream connection was how much it was enjoyed and appreciated by AmeriCorps members and volunteers. AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers told grantee staff and AmeriCorps members told NCCC program staff that it was a highlight of their service. AmeriCorps staff and grantees took this to heart and worked to deepen connections within/across streams and generations within CCRC. The "League of AmeriFriends"<sup>38</sup> would be set up later in 2020 and go live in 2021 - aiming to connect members and volunteers in an informal setting, to encourage these productive social connections.

Cohort 1 - 8/24/2020

# members: 98

Dropped: 34

Retention rate: 65%

Cohort 2 - 9/8/2020

# members: 47

Dropped: 11

Retention: 77%

Cohort 3 - 9/21/2020

# members: 30

Dropped: 4

Retention: 87%

## C. AmeriCorps State and National Successes and Challenges

### AmeriCorps State and National

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<sup>38</sup> See the Examples of Early Replication section for a description of this cross-stream, social affinity group that assigned members and volunteers to diverse, intergenerational "pods" and allowed case investigators to further connect to one another in a more relaxed setting.

AmeriCorps State and National members joined CCRC in November 2020 as a partnership between Serve Colorado (state commission), Community Resource Center, and Conservation Legacy. Between November 30, 2020, and January 25, 2021, CRC and CL onboarded 100 AmeriCorps members in the State and National program to help support COVID containment efforts through case investigation/contact tracing. CRC and CL were familiar with the structure through the summer AmeriCorps VISTA program. Taking lessons learned, both grantees sought to streamline onboarding and strengthen the member experience. This portion of the project was funded through Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funding that CDPHE received in partnership with Education Awards provided by AmeriCorps through the National Service Trust.

In partnership with Gary Community Investments, AmeriCorps State and National members were equipped with Chromebooks to provide service remotely. Due to this virtual service opportunity, AmeriCorps members in the State and National program served from 13 of 64 counties in Colorado and 19 other states.

### **Successes**

A benefit of AmeriCorps members in the State and National program is the ability to serve in the same role for longer periods of time. AmeriCorps members signed up for eight-to-ten month terms of service, and even though some members didn't stay for their whole term, the longer terms allowed CCRC to maintain a national service workforce for a longer time period without having to frequently train new cohorts of members and volunteers. Of the 100 AmeriCorps members in the State and National program 72 are currently serving, with the vast majority of exits due to compelling personal circumstances related to the pandemic (mental health concerns, caring for loved ones who contracted COVID-19, etc.).

AmeriCorps State and National partners brought a diversity of expertise and working styles to the project which created a collaborative environment, which started with a flexible grant-making process. Conservation Legacy and Community Resource Center were able to leverage their experience hosting AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program over the previous summer. Using this prior knowledge helped create an environment where all parties were able to collectively solve problems in real time.

In addition, the collaborative nature between partners helped promote AmeriCorps State and National positions through an accelerated recruitment timeline. Public service announcements created for recruitment with help from Gary Community Investments and in partnership with connections to Comcast were widely utilized to spread the word on this AmeriCorps State and National service opportunity.

As COVID-19 numbers fell, members had fewer case investigation/contact tracing calls to make. This created some challenges but also opened opportunities for

AmeriCorps State and National members to assist with special projects for CDPHE and the Governor’s Office. Several members were able to assist with resource navigation efforts - helping individuals understand precautions to take and how to access vaccines; tracking the appropriate handling of vaccine doses distributed to implementation sites; and more recently assisting with vaccine education efforts in rural areas with local nonprofit organizations.

Similar to AmeriCorps VISTA, the remote nature of the service allowed for an increased diversity of member recruitment. CRC saw members apply from 29 of Colorado’s 64 counties, including rural communities that wouldn’t have been able to participate otherwise; and Conservation Legacy had members serving Colorado remotely from California to New York and states in between.

The diversity of the AmeriCorps members in the State and National program served to emphasize that intergenerational service can be accomplished in one program. Members ranged in age from 19 to 75 years, some with a high school diploma and others with higher education degrees. Serving with CCRC has been a great opportunity for members to learn more about public health; many members have shown interest in continuing in the public health field.

In addition, this team was dedicated to service. Of the 100 AmeriCorps members in the State and National program serving with CCRC, four chose to serve again with CCRC through AmeriCorps VISTA over the summer, 19 AmeriCorps members had previously served on other projects with AmeriCorps through NCCC, VISTA, or AmeriCorps State and National, and 16 had a direct military affiliation.

Cohort data:

	Group 1 - 11/30/2020	Group 2 - 12/7/2020	Group 3 - 1/11/2021	Group 4 - 1/25/2021
# mbrs (CRC)	17	22	38	2
# mbrs (CL)	11	1	12	3
TOTAL	28	23	50	5

### **Challenges**

2) The need for surge case investigation/contact tracing work declined in February and March 2021, creating some challenges. Unique to other streams of service, AmeriCorps members in the State and National program serve a specified minimum number of hours. The decline in case investigation/contact tracing work made it challenging for AmeriCorps members to maintain their recommended

weekly number of hours of service to successfully complete their term of service. To combat this, CDPHE, CL, CRC, and Serve Colorado collectively sought alternative activities for members to support within the realm of COVID-19 containment. A surge in variant cases in April temporarily provided hours for CCRC members as local public health agencies/authorities were overwhelmed with the influx. As June approached, a sharp drop in cases created another challenge. As of the writing of this report, AmeriCorps State and National partners are working together to find alternative activities for members.

The emotional toll of case investigation/contact tracing for a longer period of time was difficult for some AmeriCorps members, especially those who were directly impacted by COVID-19. Project staff helped support members in various ways: Serve Colorado provided all members with access to counseling support, while CRC and CL created wellness sessions facilitated by members and offered peer support opportunities as well as individualized check-ins with staff.

The structure of CCRC within CDPHE was adjusted throughout the project. During AmeriCorps members’ terms of service, supervisor structures shifted, and team leads changed. These organizational shifts improved the internal structure of CCRC, but changes were challenging for some members. The flexibility of CDPHE and member support provided by Conservation Legacy and Community Resource Center assisted members greatly during each transition.

**NOTE: AmeriCorps State and National members will continue to serve with the CDPHE and the Governor’s Office on case investigation/contact tracing and vaccine outreach efforts through September 2021.**

AmeriCorps State and National Impact by Month	Case Investigations	Contact Notifications	AmeriCorps State and National % of CCRC
December	453 (5.06%)	86 (3.30%)	44 (13.5%)
January	1345 (18.1%)	322 (13.4%)	98 (28.3%)
February	1551 (38.6%)	899 (35.3%)	91 (33.1%)
March	1505 (43.6%)	1000 (39.8%)	85 (33.2%)

April	2387 (40%)	889 (40.8%)	76 (37.6%)
May	1856 (44%)	690 (47.5%)	73 (42.7%)

Data from Weekly Reports 23 (December data), 28 (January data), 32 (February data), 35 (March data), 40 (April data), and 44 (May data).

## CCRC End and Future Projects

### A. Scaling the program to respond to the need

CCRC entered 2021 with a huge amount of people power, left over from a slowly receding wave of high COVID-19 numbers in November and December 2020. The program began the year with 167 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers, who made up 51.2% of a larger 326-person corps. There were 74 AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers through RSVP, 49 AmeriCorps members through NCCC, and 44 AmeriCorps members through AmeriCorps State and National active at the beginning of the year (although the number of active AmeriCorps State and National members was about to double as a third cohort of members began training in January 2021). CCRC had a lot of capacity alongside low case counts during much of this time, although their member numbers were crucial during the fourth wave of COVID-19 cases in April 2021. Overall, CCRC had to cautiously scale down - an announcement CDPHE leadership made formal in February 2021. Although exact number reduction goals fluctuated with the changing needs of the pandemic, the general effort was to downsize CDPHE staff who supervise members, AmeriCorps NCCC, and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers since AmeriCorps State and National, and the contractors regularly worked uninterrupted 40-hour weeks.

The plan to keep CCRC active through the end of 2021 in a case investigation/contact tracing capacity remained unchanged. Although in-person vaccination work was advocated for by CCRC leadership, CDPHE ultimately funneled this work to different teams. Having teams dedicated to case investigation/contact tracing remained a great insurance policy as more and more variants were detected in Colorado. CDPHE decided to renew contracted staff, as a subset of temporary personnel through the end of the year, downsize to a smaller number of investigators by the summer, consolidate teams (after the loss of Team Leads) within CCRC's five regions, opt out of renewing the program's MOU in July 2021 (as AmeriCorps State and National could continue without it as the sole AmeriCorps presence, if need be), and highlight CCRC's pathway to employment for its members. For a glimpse of how member numbers fluctuated during this period, see the data sub-section below.

During winter and spring 2021, Colorado experienced lower sustained case counts of COVID-19. Colorado also saw the faster-spreading B.1.1.7 variant of COVID-19 become the dominant form of COVID-19 in the state, gained access to more vaccines and worked to increase vaccination rates, and CDPHE reported a seven-day testing positivity rate between 2.82% and 8.26%. Seven-day testing positivity was highest coming into the new year, then steadily declined before ramping up into the “fourth wave” in Colorado - consistently around 5-6% and peaking in mid-to-late April. CCRC adapted its training and work to the new COVID-19 variants, with an initially much-longer script and other extra work for investigators that led to increased levels of burnout on the part of a corps that was beginning to scale down.

In the final months of the program, COVID-19 rates and member numbers both decreased. While waves of higher COVID-19 numbers were handled by CCRC during this period, the seven-day testing positivity rate remained low in Colorado. AmeriCorps members in the NCCC program were pulled from the program to assist FEMA with mass vaccination sites across the country and many AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers finished their service commitments.<sup>39</sup> These departing AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers included two teams working on a special project for the State Lab.

After completing training, AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers were assigned to call people who had taken COVID-19 tests at state-run testing sites and report test results. Although they made thousands of call attempts in addition to the calls they completed to successfully report test results, one person could be served relatively quickly by the State Lab teams (when compared with a full case investigation, which could take two or more days). For this reason, once these teams offboarded in mid-April, the number of individuals served by AmeriCorps teams each month declined.<sup>40</sup>

The final formula for determining the number of individuals served was revised as a result; the final number of Coloradans served was adjusted to a more conservative, accurate count.

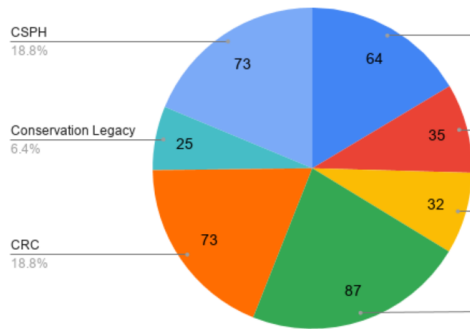
### *Member Numbers/Streams, Jan-May 2021*

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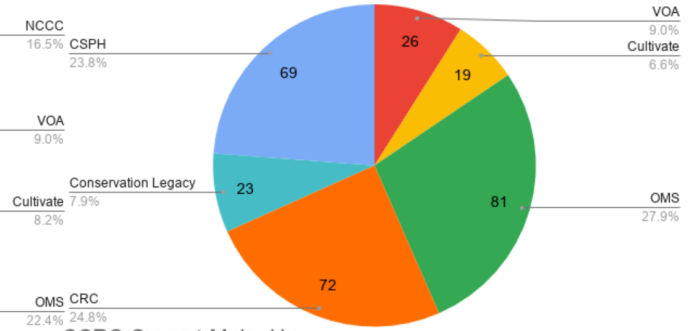
<sup>39</sup> Since AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP volunteers had all met and exceeded their initial term length agreements, many stayed on to help only because the need was great. When case counts became consistently low, organizers noticed a pattern in RSVP volunteers departing the program.

<sup>40</sup> As a reminder to the reader, all data below are the combined totals of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. Individuals served = cases + contacts + ¾ of all test results delivered.

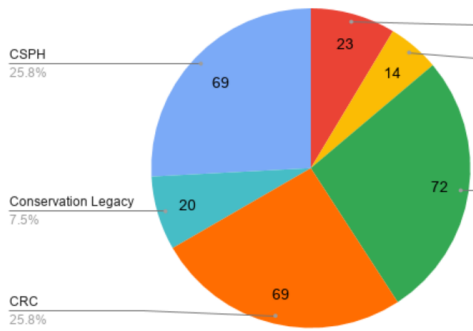
Current CCRC Makeup



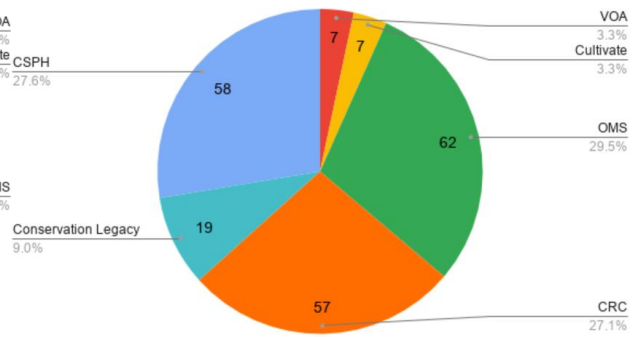
Current CCRC Makeup



Current CCRC Makeup

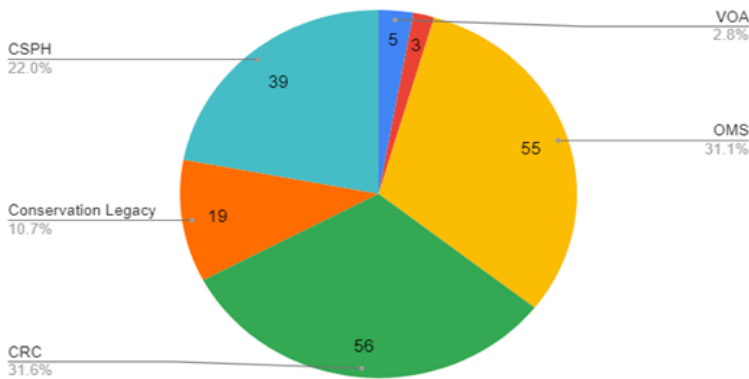


CCRC Current Make Up





### CCRC Current Make Up



### Stats for above pie charts

- Jan; W.R. 26; 1/28/21; 229 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 59% of CCRC.
- Feb; W.R. 29/30; 2/25/21; 140 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 48.3% of CCRC.
- March; W.R. 34; 3/25/21; 126 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 47.1% of CCRC.
- April; W.R. 39; 4/29/21; 90 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 42.7% of CCRC.
- May; W.R. 43; 5/27/21; 83 AmeriCorps mems/vols make up 46.9% of CCRC.
  - Note that the same colors denote different streams in this last pie graph.

### SAME AS ABOVE

January: 6,813  
 February: 5,016  
 March: 3,840  
 April: 4,162  
 May: 2,626

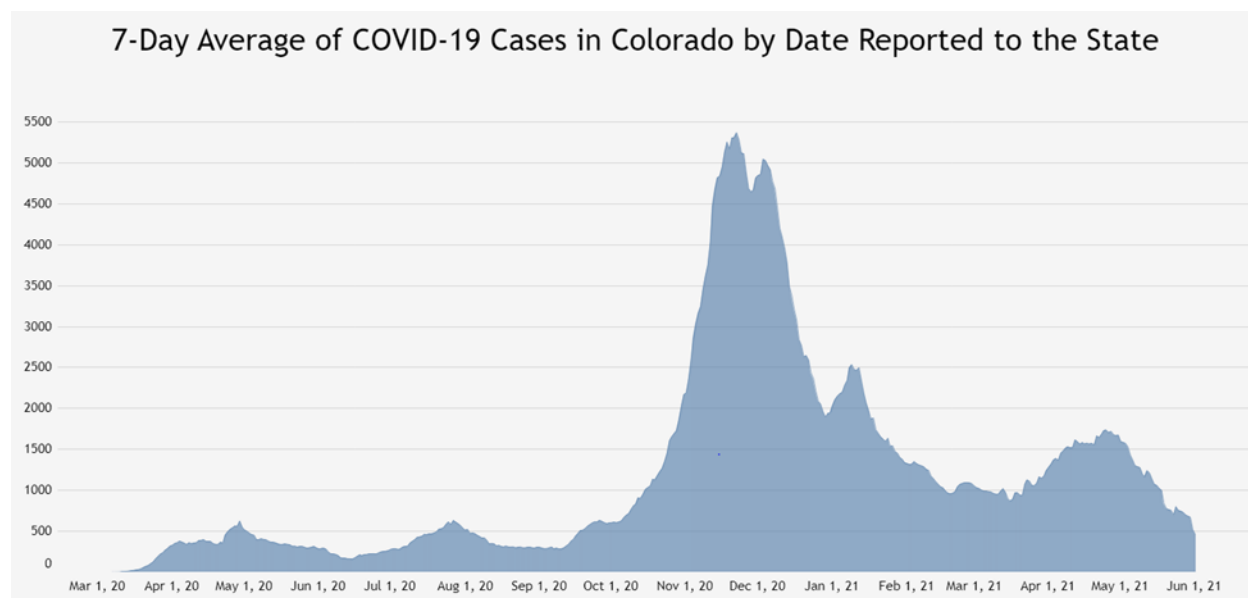
### Case Investigations

January: 2,390  
 February: 1,923  
 March: 1,679  
 April: 2,586  
 May: 1,916

### Contact Notifications

January: 651  
 February: 1,076  
 March: 1,109  
 April: 1,041  
 May: 710

As more variants arrived (Beta and Delta), the case investigation script was revised so that all COVID-19 cases were treated as “variant of interest”, “variant of concern” or “variant of high consequence”. CDPHE introduced a COVID-19 variants hub on their data-driven website, beginning in mid-April. Colorado’s Governor announced the removal of a mask mandate in the state in mid-May and roughly 2.6 million Coloradans were vaccinated by June 1, 2021. During the first few months of 2021, CCRC leadership tried to ramp down member/volunteer numbers after COVID-19 numbers decreased and stayed low, reduce hours for existing investigators (first just Sundays off, then entire weekends<sup>41</sup>, help members/volunteers cope with variant investigations and with the downsizing of CCRC staff/supervisors, and further connect members/volunteers to one another.



From Weekly Report 44, published 6/4/2021.

### B. Examples of Early Replication

In the first few days of the Biden administration, national service was highlighted as a tool to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. This, among other factors, helped increase national interest in programs with a similar structure to CCRC. Although project partners had been approached by community organizations in their regions (ORO Mountain Region’s states and NCCC Southwest’s states), and had involved partners from all over the U.S. in the project, AmeriCorps leadership began to see replication of the program’s model on a grander scale across the United States.

One of President Biden’s first executive orders called for the creation of a U.S. Public Health Jobs Corps. Modeled after AmeriCorps NCCC/FEMA Corps, U.S. Public

<sup>41</sup> With the exception of one team of investigators that continued to work Saturday shifts.

Health Jobs Corps would provide contact tracing and vaccination work all over the U.S. and aim to mobilize 100,000 people. In the Biden administration's first 100 days, NCCC was asked to contribute teams<sup>42</sup> to the first waves of national service-assisted, in-person vaccination efforts. The teams departed CCRC to serve in a disaster relief capacity at mass vaccination sites around the country. The final NCCC teams left in February 2021, leaving AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers and teams from AmeriCorps State and National.

Partnerships between national service and public health did not end there, as the CDC partnered with AmeriCorps<sup>43</sup> and FEMA partnered with Peace Corps<sup>44</sup> to place members/volunteers to work in the public health sphere. Long-time champion of public service and former AmeriCorps board member, Phyllis Segal, also took an interest in CCRC during this time. Mrs. Segal was particularly interested in the intergenerational aspect of CCRC - the fact that members of all ages were contributing to the pandemic recovery in Colorado. She co-authored a Newsweek article<sup>45</sup> arguing for the utility of an intergenerational vaccine corps and mentioned CCRC as a possible model to replicate.<sup>46</sup>



(Pamela Edwards, AmeriCorps State and National member)

Mrs. Segal was especially interested in CCRC affinity group dubbed "The League of AmeriFriends," which had its kick-off event during the Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service on January 18, 2021. The concept stemmed from the success of the intergenerational tech connection forged between NCCC and AmeriCorps Seniors during the fall of 2020, commonly mentioned as one of the highlights of the project for NCCC members and RSVP volunteers alike. Grantee staff and AmeriCorps staff worked to recruit and connect small, voluntary groups of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers for a kind of "extracurricular" social connection. The idea was to get them connected to members outside of their assigned teams within CCRC and create

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<sup>42</sup> NCCC can redeploy teams of AmeriCorps members to respond to national disasters through a process called Mission Assignments.

<sup>43</sup> [White House Announces \\$400 Million for Public Health AmeriCorps](#)

<sup>44</sup> [Peace Corps Volunteers to Aid U.S. COVID-19 Response by Deploying to FEMA-supported Community Vaccination Centers](#)

<sup>45</sup> [We Need a Dedicated COVID Vaccine Corps. Why Not an Intergenerational One?](#)

<sup>46</sup> Published 1/8/2021 and reported in the Colorado Contact Tracing Weekly Report on 1/14/2021.

a better-connected corps that could help itself through the emotional and social difficulties of case investigation/contact tracing from home.

Phyllis Segal worked to be connected to the league’s small-group facilitators, volunteers, and members to conduct interviews for articles she continued to write on the intergenerational service model. Her leadership at Encore.org helped produce a similar public health corps in the Bay Area of California. The Encore Intergenerational Vaccine Corps<sup>47</sup> aims to combine the strengths of multiple generations and streams of service. The program couples retired health professionals, through the AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program, with other members through the AmeriCorps State and National program to assist with vaccination site logistics. The Corps aims to be 300 members/volunteers strong.

CCRC was also mentioned as a model in a March 17, 2021, CNN op-ed piece,<sup>48</sup> co-authored by David Gergen of Harvard Kennedy School. The piece argues for service as a uniting force and points to how AmeriCorps programs have already had a positive impact in communities by helping to combat COVID-19. Colorado COVID Recovery Program leadership also heard interest from many localities about setting up their own version of CCRC, scaled to their location/priorities. Leadership hosted meetings with the city of Topeka, Missouri’s public health department, and New Mexico’s state service commission. AmeriCorps staff on the project also won the agency-wide “CEO Award” for their efforts on a successful project that addressed COVID-19 directly and on a relatively large scale (December 2020). The project gained significant attention for the largest-scale, cross-stream service collaboration of the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic before going on to be replicated in different forms throughout the country.

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<sup>47</sup> [AmeriCorps Mobilizes 300 for Bay Area Intergenerational Vaccine Corps](#)

<sup>48</sup> [This program puts people to work serving America. Now it’s going to jump in size](#)

### C. Impact of the program on members

The impact of CCRC, like the impact of national service, is deeply profound and personal to each individual who serves.



(Benjamin Liu, VISTA Member)

The program exceeded expectations as a pathway to employment for the members and volunteers who served, from early summer 2020 to the project's wind-down phase. The table below shows which programs members and volunteers served with and how many were hired directly by CDPHE, or onto their temp staff of investigators. Roughly 934 members/volunteers served with CCRC in some capacity since the program's inception. (CDPHE adds that this statistic is likely not perfect but is the best current estimate.) Of those 934, 84 former CCRC members and volunteers were hired to continue case investigation/contact tracing. This amounts to roughly 11% who gained direct employment due to their service experience in the Colorado COVID

Recovery Program.

Hired	CDPHE	OMS
AmeriCorps Seniors	1	7
NCCC	2	1
VISTA	8	65

In an effort to capture the true impact of the program on members, we have included their words below:

*"During my time with CDPHE I've learned to roll with the punches. The minute you've finally nailed down the process for something, it changes, sometimes drastically. You can't rely on the rules to workday by day. Every day is a brand-new challenge. I thought I was a very flexible person before I started this job, and now I see I can do even more than I thought before. I've learned that public health is about building trust more than anything. If people don't trust you it doesn't matter if what you're telling someone to do is in their best interest - they have to trust you first." -CL AmeriCorps State and National member, WR 38, 4/22/21*

*"Being able to reach out to people directly feels beneficial. After months of hearing about ways to stop COVID-19 I finally feel as though I am making a difference. I have always been an extremely empathetic person. This program has given me the tools to*

*effectively control my empathy in tough situations, as well as given me an opportunity to focus my energy and empathy towards the goal of defeating COVID-19.” -CRC AmeriCorps State and National member, WR 34, 03/25/2021*

*“The longer I do this job, and the more I learn about all the ways that the pandemic is impacting society, the more motivated I feel to use my time and skills toward helping our country navigate and eventually recover from the virus. I was interested in a career in healthcare before starting this job and working as a CI/CT [case investigation/contact tracing] has reaffirmed that goal. My interest in health equity has been reinvigorated through this work and the training required for it.” -VISTA summer associate member, WR 7, 09/17/2020*

*“I am shocked and humbled and grateful that I was able to provide direct support for someone suffering from severe symptoms of COVID-19. It was a powerful moment and further proof as to why I serve and why I want to continue to serve. It felt really good. Sometimes I feel so small in the universe. But being an AmeriCorps member and doing such important service has shown me how big I can be and what a powerful difference I can make.” -CRC AmeriCorps State and National member, WR 35, 04/01/2021*

*“Overall, this experience with CDPHE has connected to my bachelor’s degree of Family Science in Public Health, my passion to help others and my interests in my career moving forward much greater than I ever initially thought it would. It has turned out to be such a rewarding experience not just with the public health aspect and being directly involved but also working with and getting to know wonderful, supportive people along the way. Occasionally I will have moments where I realize how actively involved I am in the public health side of COVID-19 and the prevention aspect of trying to reduce the spread of the virus and be amazed that I am able to help out in this way. I know that in terms of my career this entire experience will assist me greatly in the future once I complete my hours and am searching for that next step or position.” -CL AmeriCorps State and National member, WR 37, 04/15/2021*

*“The classes I have taken regarding health equity have been so insightful. As a white woman from a middle-class background, I had no idea of the magnitude of the problem. I look forward to getting more involved in righting this wrong in our country. That is probably the biggest impact my participation has had on my life. I also learned so much about the LGBTQ community and about the expanded definitions regarding personal sexuality. I have come to realize that all these ideas and concepts have always been a part of our lives, but they were never discussed or given such a broad vocabulary to help define this complex subject. I am delighted to be a part of a society that is awakening to and embracing these differences.” -CRC VISTA summer associate member, WR 7, 09/17/2020*

*"I was laid off at the beginning of the pandemic and have struggled to re-enter the workforce at my previous level. With this service position, I'm able to prevent a big gap in my work experience and have gained exposure to a new field, network, and perspective while I rethink my career future options." -CRC AmeriCorps State and National member WR 44, 06/01/2021*

*"I have skills that I never realized and have been given the ability to shine." - AmeriCorps Seniors Cultivate volunteer Jim Lytton 11/16/2020*

*"A sense of satisfaction that I helped a little. A sense of accomplishment that I have new skills to listen to and learn from a broader group of people." - AmeriCorps Seniors VOA volunteer Debbie Sagen 11/16/2020*

*"A sense of having contributed in a small way to fighting the pandemic. Sometimes people just needed someone to talk to, and I am happy when I could provide that support as well as health information. I also have a greater appreciation for our health departments nationwide." - AmeriCorps Seniors Cultivate volunteer Carol Farren 11/16/2020*

*"I took away many things: 1. An understanding of our state health department and a deep appreciation of the expertise and dedication they apply as they continue to manage the pandemic; 2 In addition to my improvement in technology and communication skills, I think I became a better team worker; 3. an appreciation of the wonderful people of Colorado; and a deep appreciation of the VOA AmeriCorps Seniors and their dedication to helping others. Personally, I have a lot of hope for the future." - AmeriCorps Seniors VOA volunteer Ann Stanford 11/16/2020*

### 2021 Data (Jan-May)

In the final months of the program, COVID-19 rates and member numbers both decreased. While waves of higher COVID-19 numbers were handled by CCRC during this period, the seven-day testing positivity rate remained low in Colorado.

AmeriCorps members were pulled from the NCCC program to join the first waves of the future USPHJC commissioned by the Biden administration Executive Order and many AmeriCorps Seniors departed the corps. These departing Senior teams included two teams working on a "special project" for the State Lab.

After completing training, these teams were assigned to call people who had taken COVID-19 tests at state-run testing sites and report out their test results. Although they made thousands of call attempts in addition to the calls they completed to successfully report test results, one person could be served relatively quickly by the State Lab teams (when compared with a full case investigation, which could take two

or more days). For this reason, once these teams offboarded in mid-April, the number of individuals served by AmeriCorps parties each month declined.<sup>49</sup>

The final formula for individuals served was the result of a meeting between Sam Twynam and Heather Baily during this time period and revised the way we documented the test results delivered into the total individuals served.<sup>50</sup> This meant that the final number of Coloradans served was revised from very high to very low to a faithful midpoint over the course of the project.

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<sup>49</sup> As a reminder to the reader, all data below are the combined totals of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. Individuals served = cases + contacts +  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all test results delivered.

<sup>50</sup> See the "Final Data" section for further explanation.



## How-To Guide/Collaborative Model

Part of what made CCRC a valuable program to study is its multi-stream approach to service, how quickly it moved from its planning to execution stages, and its ability to successfully scale its operations up and down while providing the same quality of service. This section can serve as a guide for future programs that hope to replicate the successes experienced by CCRC in their own multi-stream projects while being aware of many potential challenges. The components of CCRC deemed to make the program successful are detailed below:

### A. Centralized Coordination

The Colorado COVID Recovery Program required several coordinated partners, each of whom brought different resources (and coordination of different elements) to the table. The project's guiding MOU was signed into effect on July 1, 2020, for a one-year term, by the following parties:

- AmeriCorps
  - Offices based in CO include: NCCC Southwest Region and ORO Mountain Region
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
  - Colorado's state agency dedicated to public health
    - Not a centralized authority over public health in the state
    - The head agency of a decentralized public health system of local public health agencies
- Serve Colorado - the Governor's Commission on Community Service
  - Colorado's state commission for community service, overseeing AmeriCorps State and National programs and grants
- COVID Check Colorado, LLC (Gary Community Investments)
  - Major nonprofit partner who supplied funding for and shipping of project tech

The Colorado COVID Recovery Program is a unique case, as there has never been an AmeriCorps cross-stream collaboration quite like it. AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation previously analyzed findings from "Operation AmeriCorps," another recent cross-stream project with many partners and produced a report on the findings of its first year.

Operation AmeriCorps does not offer a 1:1 comparison for study, but the schema devised to determine its successful organizational elements bear scrutiny in a CCRC context. ORE note from its research "the importance of high levels of organizational network capacity in order to achieve change to a pressing social problem." Specifically, "a strong, 'deputized' backbone organization that is empowered to

(centrally) manage partnerships, resources, and activities<sup>51</sup> - as well as other key, but less organizationally central partners is crucial for that organizational capacity.<sup>52</sup> According to ORE, this program structure is of benefit in making quick and coordinated decisions and leveraging partner strengths, but requires the capacity for a lot of communication,<sup>53</sup> as well as other key, but less organizationally central partners is crucial for that organizational capacity.<sup>54</sup> According to ORE, this program structure is of benefit in making quick and coordinated decisions and leveraging partner strengths, but requires the capacity for a lot of communication.<sup>55</sup>

Once Operation AmeriCorps partners were assigned a role within this model, ORE worked to identify whether (and to what degree) the following elements were present:

- *Backbone organization - To what extent did the project have an identifiable coordinating organization?*
- *Partner relationships - What was the nature of partner relationships? More specifically, how formalized were these relationships and to what degree was the impacted community involved?*
- *Mission clarity - To what degree were partners and participants clear on what the project was aiming to accomplish?*
- *Communications and data - To what extent did the project have systems in place that effectively coordinated information and data among partners?*
- *Catalytic<sup>56</sup> - Underpinning all of the above elements, to what extent could the... grant be seen as responsible for instigating the creation of these components of network capacity?<sup>57</sup>*

These elements add an interesting lens through which to view the Colorado COVID Recovery Program.

### *Backbone Organization*

Although not formally outlined in the MOU, AmeriCorps and CDPHE are the two primary backbone organizations in this collaboration. They are the only two organizations involved at every level, with every program, and in every major

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<sup>51</sup> [Operation AmeriCorps National Evaluation: One Year Findings](#), CNCS ORE, 1/13/17, Page 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Other groups of importance in the schema devised by ORE include: "a group of other key partner organizations involved closely in day-to-day service provision (called operating partners); and additional outside supporters that provide strategic support and resources as required (called peripheral supporters)..."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Related to or involving the action of a catalyst (Oxford English Dictionary).

<sup>57</sup> [Operation AmeriCorps National Evaluation: One Year Findings](#), CNCS ORE, 1/13/17. Bulleted list drawn verbatim from Page 6.

decision. Each organization brought complimentary national and state-level resources to the COVID-19 response effort. AmeriCorps supplied two regional organizations (in NCCC SW and ORO Mountain Region), national funds in the form of grants, program staff (including a full-time liaison/program manager), and four flexible streams of service (NCCC, VISTA, AmeriCorps Seniors, and AmeriCorps State and National). CDPHE provided public health trainings, supervision, and a knowledgeable supervisory staff for members/volunteers performing sensitive, highly technical work involving personal health information. They also supplied the key epidemiological decision-making and forecasting that allowed CCRC to scale to respond to the level of surge support needed for COVID-19 case investigation/contact tracing.

### *Partner Relationships*

The roles of partners were formalized in the July 1, 2020, MOU and expectations were revised, according to need, through monthly high-level meetings and bi-weekly to weekly operational-level meetings between major partners. As discussed elsewhere in this report, Colorado enjoyed some pre-existing, uniquely strong relationships between parties that allowed the broad MOU to be enough to begin the process and relationships to be explored and revised in good faith according to the project's need.

### *Mission Clarity*

The MOU provided broad language for Colorado COVID Recovery Program partners to work with. There was, for instance, the consideration to adapt member/volunteer work to in-person vaccination work (directing traffic, signing people in, etc.) at certain points during the project, because the MOU had not specified that only case investigation/contact tracing work be performed (although this ended up being CDPHE's preference). The MOU provided the formalized statement of all parties' strong dedication to combatting COVID-19 in Colorado. Clarity of how this would work in a more detailed way came through collaboration and communication between project partners.

### *Communications and Data*

Although information was relayed between individual parties (revolving around backbone organizations) each week, the high-level planning meetings were only once a month. This left an obvious gap in communication especially about data and member accomplishments, particularly on the AmeriCorps side. This was anticipated from the beginning and national funds were used to select a project-dedicated program associate. Communications on this project were frequent between all parties, but the program associate position allowed for a "bird's eye view" of all parties and developments not only from the two backbone organizations, but also from the various streams of service and their grantees. The 44 weekly reports created on the project relayed up-to-date information on all parties, to all parties, on a regular

basis. In these weekly reports, CDPHE's updates were the most important to seeing the impact the project was having statewide; Sam's liaison work with CDPHE kept data and communications flowing. See the "Bird's Eye View" section below for more on the program associate role's importance.

### *Catalytic*

The 'catalytic' question asks to what extent the grant behind Operation AmeriCorps could be seen as responsible for "instigating the creation of [all of the aforementioned] components of network capacity."<sup>58</sup> Within the context of the Colorado COVID Recovery Program, the paradigm posed by the question is reversed. It was the capacity of the pre-existing network of national service and other partners in Colorado that allowed for the procurement and creation of supporting grants and collaborations. As referenced throughout the report, Colorado's service organizations had a high degree of pre-existing trust, history of positive working relationships, service alumni networking, and mutual investment in one another's success. This network of fruitful relationships and the trust in it from agency leadership allowed the collaboration to quickly procure and put funds to use. In this instance, it was the network capacity that allowed grants to be successful within the context of the program.

### *Other Operation AmeriCorps Recommendations*

Included amongst ORE's other notes and recommendations for projects on this scale are:

- Grantees as backbone organizations or having a formalized relationship with backbone organization prior to grant (Ex: MOU)
- More integration at every level = more successful grant implementation
- Organizations with a higher degree of experience or familiarity as AmeriCorps grantees had an easier time
  - Relationship between grantee and backbone organization is of particular importance
- Grantees (city governments, in the case of Operation AmeriCorps) who were made the backbone organization have fewer implementation issues (likely because they know their own regulations and requirements)
- All partner agreements under a project should be revisited on an annual basis
- Administrative difficulties are lessened where a "pre-existing, detailed contractual agreement and strong working relationship"<sup>59</sup> between grantees and backbone organizations exist<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Id. Page 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Bullet points are paraphrased from Page 14.

The Colorado COVID Recovery Program followed several of these recommendations. The MOU signed in July 2020 allowed for a formalized relationship between key organizations, with AmeriCorps and CDPHE being the de facto backbone organizations. These two organizations' sizes and specializations allowed for the integration needed at every level to maintain grant success. CRC and CL, two nonprofits already familiar with AmeriCorps and its grants, went on from VISTA grantees in the summer of 2020 to act as AmeriCorps State and National sub-grantees in late 2020 and 2021. Additionally, these organizations had close and pre-existing relationships with AmeriCorps, and frequent communication with AmeriCorps and CDPHE's CCRC leadership team. In the case of both VISTA/AmeriCorps State and National and AmeriCorps Seniors (grantees Cultivate and VOAC), weekly or twice-weekly meetings with both AmeriCorps staff and CDPHE staff were the norm throughout project planning and implementation.

The monthly planning meetings with COVID Recovery Program leads allowed project partners to reevaluate the MOU leading up to its one-year anniversary, in this case deciding that the MOU had served its purpose in launching a multi-program, public/private partnership to fight COVID-19 and need not be renewed. The MOU was broadly worded, yet clear, enough, to make all partners aware of their roles for the duration of the project while providing the flexibility to adapt to the fluctuating needs of Colorado's COVID-19 response. The backbone organizations (AmeriCorps and CDPHE) had few implementation issues in each of their realms (people/program power on a national level and public health response on a state level, respectively). However, where issues were identified, each had a dedicated program staff and point of contact to ease and increase communication. This dedicated liaison/program staff also maintained each backbone organization's high capacity for continued communication.

### **A Bird's Eye View**

In the early days of the project, it was decided the proposal to create a temporary, federal position dedicated to the Colorado COVID Recovery Program and assigned to the Colorado-local offices. The search began, among the national service community, for recommendations of alums to perform the work. Sam Twynam was selected by NCCC Southwest Region leadership to be the "conduit" connecting the MOU's parties. As a program associate, Sam acted as the project's primary liaison, data analyst, principal publicist, and the closest thing to a program manager that such a large and collaborative project could engage. Sam created a five-seven-page weekly report on the happenings and developments of the major project partners for 44 weeks and engaged all parties' leadership to learn more about CCRC's successes, challenges, and effectiveness in case investigation/contact tracing surge support.

These weekly reports were widely circulated and helped all parties keep a finger on the pulse of COVID-19 in Colorado and the current iteration of CCRC's response. In

the VISTA and also AmeriCorps State and National successes and challenges sections of this report, the reader will notice that the budget for a dedicated program team enabled these nonprofits to be successful as grantees of their programs. This was no less true on the AmeriCorps side, as having a dedicated “project expert” with the bandwidth to take on and report out about project challenges allowed other staff to continue their regular work (made more difficult during the pandemic) without loss of productivity.

Sam’s appointment as program associate was echoed on the CDPHE side with the position of “AmeriCorps Liaison” always being filled by an AmeriCorps alumnus. Sam’s work, in concert with CDPHE’s AmeriCorps Liaison, often helped iron out issues as they arose; this connection served as another important touchpoint for project partners, as both liaisons proved to be useful gatekeepers to their respective worlds. Sam’s position is proof that future projects need to put not only money, but also people power, where their mouths are when setting up a sizable cross-stream collaboration.



## B. Resources

### National Buy-In and Funds

As stated throughout this report and echoed by numerous partners, resources were critical to the success of this partnership. Combatting the COVID-19 pandemic was a national priority and agencies throughout the Federal and State government were ideating solutions to new pandemic problems and circumstances. AmeriCorps National leadership understood the need to support state responses to COVID-19, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act legislated new policy that supported the agency during COVID (e.g. raising the eligibility age for NCCC members, providing constructive credit for members who were unable to complete 1,700 hours of service due to their programs being impacted by COVID-19<sup>61</sup>, and more.)

It is important to highlight the contributions of Gary Community Investments and their subgroup, COVID Check Colorado LLC, as critical to the success of the program. While AmeriCorps provided the peoplepower, the program did not have the resources to provide each member with the technology necessary to carry out case investigation/contact tracing. GCI's investment of Chromebooks, personal hotspots, headsets and shipping made it possible for members to contact trace regardless of their location. Many other states reached out to the AmeriCorps NCCC hoping to replicate CCRC in their state but, unfortunately, could not identify who would be providing tech to their members and were ultimately unable to implement the program.

### Even Better If

Although the Colorado COVID Recovery Program was highly successful (for a largely unprecedented collaborative project), there is definite room for improvement in replicating this model elsewhere.

### *Member Buy-In*

The streams of service that recruited specifically for investigators (VISTA and AmeriCorps State and National, for example) generally had higher retention rates than those that recruited members and assigned them to case investigation/contact

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<sup>61</sup> AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Senior volunteers receive a full Segal Education award after 1700 hours of service.

tracing (such as NCCC<sup>62</sup> and RSVP<sup>63</sup>). This was again improved by the specificity/accuracy of the “position description” in recruiting materials. case investigation/contact tracing work is difficult in ways that no member imagines until they perform it; however, knowing the service they would perform (and the expectations of technological proficiency implicit in them) would help to retain members who were mentally and emotionally prepared for public health service.

### *Longer Terms and Program Exceptions*

Both CDPHE supervisors and nonprofit grantee staff found some AmeriCorps program rules created barriers to effective case investigation/contact tracing service. VISTA summer associate program members were very useful more of them were hired to begin building CCRC staff network than any other single stream of service. But those members serve for only eight-to-ten weeks. When two to three weeks is training, this leaves a short window for service. This window, in the opinion of CDPHE staff, didn’t allow case investigators enough time to master the skills needed for their service.

The ratio of service to training (80/20 ratio) and required hourly minimums (35-40 hrs/wk) stipulated by some programs meant that supervisors had to make work for members during times of low case counts. They also had to be cognizant to keep training to a minimum - even when the entire corps needed to be retrained to use a completely different case investigation/contact tracing software (as happened during the switch from “REDCap” to “Dr. Justina” in October 2020<sup>64</sup>).

### *Wi-Fi in Rural/Unsupported Areas*

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<sup>62</sup> CCRC supervisors complained that NCCC members took more of their time/energy to motivate, since they ‘had not signed up’ for the work. NCCC Pacific Region supplied two well-received teams to CCRC in January 2021. These teams (and their NCCC Team Leaders) were hand-selected by NCCC Pacific Region Units Department staff - a luxury of time and consideration that other regions did not have when selecting teams. This more considered approach seemed to create a more positive and successful NCCC/CCRC merging. Another approach considered but never attempted was the formation of “composite teams,” where an NCCC region will recruit within its corps for a specific team assignment. This was not attempted during this project due to the concern that inadequate numbers may sign up.

<sup>63</sup> Although RSVP grantees did recruit specifically for contact tracers, many RSVP volunteers later complained that the recruitment wasn’t accurate to the work being performed. This was partially because the roles assigned by CCRC evolved between the beginning of recruitment and the time Seniors finished training. It was a problem widely noted that some members went in with misapprehensions about what contact tracing work entailed - or they did not fully understand until they had been through the emotional and intellectual rigors of a case investigation. This was compounded for RSVP volunteers by the steep technology learning curve presented by Google suite, contact tracing software, and Chromebooks.

<sup>64</sup> This took place in August in pilot jurisdictions and was then implemented at a larger scale in October.



When a corps is fully remote, they heavily rely on reliable internet access. Calls, case investigation/contact tracing software, and video trainings all needed a strong wi-fi connection to enable members and volunteers to be successful. This posed a challenge for rural members since, even when they were given a mobile hotspot<sup>65</sup>, they still could not adequately connect. Mobile hotspots were a huge boon to many traveling members, including NCCC Southwest teams who had to be relocated and returned to residential environments in waves during the pandemic. However, while housed on the Southern Region campus in Vicksburg, MS, teams found that the T-Mobile cellular reception was inadequate for running a strong internet connection on the mobile hotspots. A supplemental “internet allowance” may allow members in the future to select the most powerful wi-fi for their area. Allowing members to serve remotely from their home of record could also solve the problem of wifi portability.

### *Connection and Socialization*

Although each member/volunteer was assigned to a region and team within CCRC, their interactions with their teams were almost purely work-related. Members and volunteers reported increased satisfaction when they could have the chance to socialize and connect outside of their team. The League of AmeriFriends and the NCCC-AmeriCorps Seniors tech troubleshooting collaboration were two examples of times when members reported benefits to cross-stream, intergenerational, and extra-regional connections. The service members performed through CCRC took a toll on mental health especially during times of high case counts and stress. It seems counterintuitive, but this may be just the time to have some unstructured socialization. Future corps may want to build in this social interconnectedness in from the very beginning.

### *Mutual Education*

There were times when collaborating organizations felt at odds because they did not understand one another’s programs and policies. CCRC supervisors came to understand that, for some members, CCRC was their first time in a professional environment. They could not have the same starting expectations of a retired health professional serving with AmeriCorps Seniors as they could for a freshly graduated 18-year-old serving with NCCC. Learning the ins and outs of the various AmeriCorps programs (in a more formal way and not just on the fly) would have better tempered their expectations and helped them be more accommodating supervisors. On the other hand, some AmeriCorps staff would rearrange NCCC team rosters without realizing this would affect CCRC’s regional team structure. So, sitting down and formally educating one another about programs and then working to seamlessly

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<sup>65</sup> A mobile hotspot is a piece of technology that produces a wi-fi connection that devices like laptops and smartphones can access through a mobile data connection. In areas where cellular networks were weak, mobile hotspots proved weak tools.

integrate them and make compromises would have helped during these points of tension.

### *Partner Reflections*

In early September 2020, reflections from major partners in the collaboration were gathered and analyzed for ORE. Among other questions, the qualitative feedback report's authors asked: "What about this pilot would you be sure to do again? What would you be sure to avoid? What would you add?"<sup>66</sup> Alongside longer service terms, authors note that respondents recommended future cross-stream program organizers avoid members entering service until the site(s) have a strong supervisory structure in place. Respondents also said that future organizers should overestimate the time it takes to finalize a large, multi-party MOU.<sup>67</sup> Alongside longer service terms, authors note that respondents recommended future cross-stream program organizers avoid members entering service until the site(s) have a strong supervisory structure in place. Respondents also said that future organizers should overestimate the time it takes to finalize a large, multi-party MOU.<sup>68</sup>

CDPHE and VISTA grantees both noted that extra projects, plans, activities, and trainings should be ready for members to work on when call volume is inevitably low (particularly on a disaster project like this with unpredictable workflow).<sup>69</sup> Although this exhausts the short list of general "even better ifs" from the qualitative feedback report, the document is a good resource for "bringing a large-scale, short-term AmeriCorps opportunity [like VISTA summer associates] to scale."<sup>70</sup> VISTA summer associates grantees Conservation Legacy and Community Resource Center shared specific best practices in this vein.<sup>71</sup>

## C. Scaling

### Bottom-Up/Needs Determined Locally

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<sup>66</sup> [Qualitative Feedback on the Colorado COVID-19 Recovery Pilot Program prepared for the CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation](#), 9/11/20, Page 24. This document was produced for ORE in September 2020 (utilizing the qualitative feedback of major partners to understand the CO COVID Recovery Program). The reader should note that these recommendations are specific to the early days of CCRC (July-August) and the streams of service involved at that point (primarily VISTA).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Id. Pages 24-25.

It was a local, Colorado-based organization that initially brought to AmeriCorps the idea of the Colorado COVID Recovery Program.<sup>72</sup> CDPHE designed CCRC to act as surge support when local public health authorities were overwhelmed by the number of cases in their area and needed help investigating all of them. The regional structure of CCRC's teams enabled the corps to respond to the highest local need for surge support, in real time, seven days a week. Although AmeriCorps provided funds on the national level, it was Colorado's regional AmeriCorps offices who interfaced daily with CDPHE and other project partners. After the signing of the MOU, Colorado partners were the guiding forces behind the directions the project took. CCRC scaled its member numbers and intensity of response to the COVID-19 outbreaks in Colorado, the variants that were detected in the state, and the models of future infection rates developed by Colorado's public health professionals. Although the project's model has already been replicated (to lesser and greater degrees) around the nation, CCRC was an effort based on moment-to-moment local needs during a national crisis.

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<sup>72</sup> See Michael Johnston (GCI CEO) letter above.

## Index of Abbreviations and Key Links

### Abbreviations

- 3) CCC - COVID Check Colorado, LLC (part of GCI)
- 4) CCRC - COVID-19 Containment Response Corps
- 5) CDPHE - Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- 6) CI/CT - Case Investigation/Contact Tracing
- 7) CL - Conservation Legacy
- 8) CNCS - Corporation for National and Community Service
- 9) CRC - Community Resource Center
- 10) CSPH - Colorado School of Public Health
- 11) Dr. Justina - CI/CT software purpose-built for CDPHE; replaced REDCap in October 2020
- 12) FEMA - Federal Emergency Management Agency
- 13) GCI - Gary Community Investments
- 14) MOU - Memorandum of Understanding
- 15) NCCC - National Civilian Community Corps
- 16) OMS - Optimize Manpower Solutions (CI/CT temp staff made up of CCRC alums)
- 17) ORO - Office of Regional Outreach
- 18) REDCap - Research Electronic Data Capturing (CI/CT software)
- 19) RSVP - Retired Senior Volunteer Program (AmeriCorps Seniors program)
- 20) AmeriCorps VISTA - Volunteers in Service to America
- 21) VOAC - Volunteers of America Colorado

### Key Links

- 1) [COVID Containment Response Corps 6-month report](#)
- 2) [COVID Containment Response Corps MOU](#)
- 3) [Qualitative Feedback on the Colorado COVID-19 Recovery Pilot Program prepared for the CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation](#)
- 4) [COVID Collaboration Weekly Report 20 \(6-month mark\)](#)
- 5) [COVID Collaboration Weekly Report 43 \(last report\)](#)