

AmeriCorps Seniors Recovery- Continues

Pandemic Recovery: The Path Forward for AmeriCorps Seniors Programs and Service



To: AmeriCorps Seniors Grantees/Sponsors
From: AmeriCorps Seniors
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Summary: Guidance for AmeriCorps Seniors grantees on continuing to return to service during the COVID-19

Re: Pandemic Recovery Return to Service Recommendations

It has been a year since our country and communities drastically changed. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, our country has experienced an unprecedented decline of the stock market, business closures and unparalleled unemployment, food pantries overrun with families who in the past donated to such organizations now need the services of them, and in the most simplest terms a complete overflow of citizens needing services from our nation's health care system. With that we have also see our fellow Americans rise to the challenge to meet the needs of their fellow man and community. We have seen our AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers find prolific ways to serve their communities in need. AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers have started virtual reading session, bingo nights for homebound and isolated older adults, and while practicing safe precautions brought meals to families in need.

As we enter a year of living in these difficult times, we must plan towards the recovery and reopening of our nation and plan for all AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers to return to serve in America restructures business operations and volunteer service programs during this unprecedented period. The purpose of this document is to provide information and be used as a guide on how to implement and engage AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in safe service activities.

Summary of Flexibilities Provided to Grantees

COVID-19 has had a direct impact on many grantees' ability to continue normal program operations in communities across the country. Following local, state, and federal guidelines, many sponsors had needed to suspended volunteer activities to ensure the safety of their staff and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. AmeriCorps Seniors has focused on finding new ways to ensure safe, productive and enriching service occurs.

To help support those efforts, AmeriCorps Seniors approved a number of relief measures that can help ensure compliance with the legal requirements of grant awards and maintain the integrity of the AmeriCorps Seniors programs, while at the same time giving grantees the comfort of knowing they will have the funding needed to meet the needs of the communities they serve on the other side of this pandemic. Current relief efforts include:

- Temporary volunteer allowance for FGP/SCP Volunteers
- Grantee Matching funds waiver for FY2019, FY2020, and FY2021
- Support of OMB directive for grantee staff pay
- Guidance addressing Performance Measures

Next Steps

Based on continued information provided by the AmeriCorps Seniors Associations and their boards, discussions with grantees and sponsors, and following the recommendation of AmeriCorps and with the approval from the Office of General Counsel, described below is a framework for reopening AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer service opportunities. As

grantees continue to plan and implement service during this needed time, this document is not an exclusive list nor a required plan of action, rather a compilation of recommended safe service practices and service flexibilities.

AmeriCorps Seniors recognizes in many places volunteer service is going to look very different. AmeriCorps Seniors promotes safe volunteering practices as the well-being of our volunteers is our first priority. The impact of AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers is undeniable and is crucial for the reopening of America, but all programs must evaluate what that means and how that will be defined in their own communities.

Alternative Service Plans

If grantees have volunteers unable to engage in activities defined on their original Notice of Grant Award due to COVID-19, grantees are required to draft Alternative Service Plans to ensure AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers have safe and impactful ways to service their communities. These Alternative Service Plans should be documented in Performance Measure and work plans. Please ensure your Portfolio Manager is aware and approves any updates you wish to make.

[Suggestion on Alternative Services can be found in section Service Activities- Common Traditional and New Permissible Flexibilities to Serve and AmeriCorps Seniors Performance Measure- COVID.](#)

Safe Volunteering – A Pathway to Service

As the country continues to adapt to the COVID-19 Pandemic, AmeriCorps Seniors service programs are having to strike a balance between maintaining the basic functions of program delivery while ensuring safe volunteering practices. AmeriCorps Seniors grantees have always responded to local community needs through a wide variety of service delivery models and during this time of a nationwide pandemic that will be no different. Furthermore, as communities move to next steps to reopening, it will no longer be a question of if AmeriCorps Seniors programs will use technology in service activities, but rather how technology will be utilized in service activities to support safe volunteering. These are uncharted waters and AmeriCorps Seniors is committed to continuing to explore discrete options to support safe volunteering and a return to service.

There has never been a one-size-fits-all approach for all programs or all communities, and that will not change. The need for continued flexibilities in volunteer activities is critical at this time, while also providing a balance within the realm of allowable activities outlined under each AmeriCorps Seniors program's federal regulations.

Safety Recommendations – Return to Service

In light of state and local government officials across the country's easing up on the stringent business and government closures and stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees continue to prepare and implement return-to-volunteer service plans that promote both volunteers' safety and appropriate social-distancing service activities while also reducing any risk to the COVID -19 virus for volunteers and the individuals and communities they serve. Below are recommendations for grantees and volunteer stations to consider.

- AmeriCorps Seniors strongly recommends grantees follow the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reopening guidance, and their own state and county re-opening measures. Senior Corps is mindful that each location may be on a different timeline based on each state's local conditions and specific geographic region.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees ensure physical service locations (volunteer stations) are safe and, social distancing measures are implemented.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees provide an ample amount of cleaning products and hand sanitizer for volunteers to use on their own and in commonly used shared spaces.

- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees ensure that volunteers wear face coverings at service locations where appropriate. For those volunteers who are unable to wear face coverings due to a medical condition or disability, the grantees should consider assigning those volunteers to teleservice work or other service activities that will not require a face covering.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees close off access to physical service location common areas, break rooms, and other areas where volunteers congregate.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees strongly discourage visitors from entering grantee and volunteer station facilities.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees schedule volunteers’ return to service at physical service locations on staggered shifts and/or rotating schedules.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees establish a protocol for health screening and apply it consistently to all volunteers who are volunteering at a service location. Grantees should consider legal and logistical issues before implementing any health screening measures for volunteers.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees develop and implement a health screening survey or questionnaire for volunteers that is simple and easy to access. The survey or questionnaire could ask volunteers whether they have tested positive for COVID-19, have been diagnosed with COVID-19 by a medical professional; have been directed to self-isolate by a public health authority or by a healthcare provider due to potential exposure to COVID-19. Completed surveys and questionnaires should be maintained as confidential information in a separate and secure location.
- AmeriCorps Seniors recommends that grantees issue a policy requiring volunteers to inform the grantee promptly if they test positive for or are diagnosed with COVID-19 and to stay home and includes meeting any state-specific notification requirements. The policy should give the grantee the opportunity to take steps quickly to prevent the infection from spreading in their facilities or service locations.

Service Activities- Common Traditional and New Permissible Flexibilities to Serve

The flexibilities identified below have been deemed **permissible service activities** for AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers during this time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. **The Service Activities listed below are presented as options and should not be considered as an all-inclusive list.**

*FGP – these service activities were pulled from the AmeriCorps Seniors FGP Handbook - 7.1.2 Foster Grandparent Assignments

**RSVP – these service activities were pulled from the AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Handbook - 7.2.1 Selection of Assignments Range of Options

***SCP – these service activities were pulled from the AmeriCorps Seniors SCP Handbook - 7.1.2 Senior Companion Assignments

Foster Grandparent Program	RSVP	Senior Companion Program
Encourage the social and emotional development of disadvantaged young children. *	All service activities listed for the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Program.	Accompany the client to social activities and medical appointments. ***
Read to a child in a Head Start program. *	Organize neighborhood watch programs. **	Assist with activities of daily living such as meal preparation, grocery

		shopping, offering medication reminders. ***
Teach English to a child for whom it is a second language. *	Tutor and mentor disadvantaged or disabled youth. **	Provide transportation to social activities or for basic errands. ***
Tutor disadvantaged youth towards GED completion. *	Renovate homes. **	Participate in reading together or writing correspondence programs. ***
Tutor/mentor student in-person or virtually.	Teach English to immigrants. **	Write letters via a pen pal program to home-bound or isolated seniors.
Tutor/mentor student over the telephone or through a tutoring call-in line.	Assist victims of natural disasters. **	Telephone or video chats with home-bound or isolated seniors.
Support students in their efforts to complete special projects or the development of student packets for distance learning.	Write letters via a pen pal programs for example with but not limited to students, veterans, home-bound or isolated seniors.	Delivery of groceries, medications, meals or other essential items to but limited to home-bound or isolated seniors.
Read books with children virtually and engage with the students in discussion questions regarding the book. Could be done virtually, through stories being recorded by the volunteer or over the telephone.	Telephone or video chats with but not limited to students, veterans, home-bound or isolated seniors.	Provide respite relief through virtual support utilizing FaceTime or similar technology.
Serve as a pen pal for both writing skills development and social support.	Delivery groceries, medications, meals or other essential items to but limited to veterans, home-bound or isolated seniors.	Telephone or wellness checks on other seniors through an established state or Department of Aging call plan.
Support connecting to educational resources for both students and parents, i.e. library/book mobile resources.	Transportation programs for veterans, home-bound or isolated seniors.	
Support admission and release activities each day to ensure safe practices for students.	Support student learning efforts through providing administrative support for teachers.	
Serve as school greeters to welcome and reassure parents/children throughout the school day and ensure safe learning environments as parents/children enter school buildings.	Support the work of community gardens projects.	
Support the preparation and/or delivery of meals to students.	Serve at Meals on Wheels programs, Food Pantries, and/or other community food drive initiatives.	
Telephone wellness check-ins with students focused on overall well-being of student not necessarily a learning objective.	Serve at drive-through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Programs.	
Telephone check-ins with parents/caregiver to determine what learning resources are needed to support students virtual learning needs.	Support COVID-19 community-based contact tracing initiatives.	

Create science mystery boxes or take-home activities for students to explore.		
Create video demonstrations of new skills students can explore at home. Videos could include but not limited to cooking, sewing, or woodworking.		
Provide to children with special or exceptional needs or circumstances life skills lesson on topics such as but not limited to job readiness, virtual job interview practice, school readiness, budgeting, hygiene, or meal planning.		
Deliver meals to isolated children with special or exceptional needs or circumstances.		

Note: Grantees must ensure that a volunteer’s activities are not otherwise prohibited (e.g. lobbying) and are not activities that paid staff or non-AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers would otherwise perform. Grantees cannot assign volunteer activities that supplant hiring or paid staff or non-AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers’ assignments or displace currently existing staff or volunteers. Also, to the extent the grantee organization has contracts in effect to perform services, none of the service activities assigned to volunteers may impair those contracts.

In Conclusion

It is known that not all programs, nor all communities will be able to open at the same rate due to the impact of COVID-19 on individual geographic locations. It is also important to acknowledge that while some communities may be reopening, volunteer stations such as schools may limit the number of outside persons allowed in any building or classroom at any one time. Similarly, senior home health care programs may limit or reduce the number of outside visitors into homes or day program facilities. As communities are struggling with planning on what to next to reconstitute, the questions are becoming increasingly more challenging. It is critical that all grantees stay in close contact with their Portfolio Manager.

It is also important to acknowledge that we are providing this document as a suggested, permissible path forward for as an approach to promote *safety for our volunteers* and provide service during this pandemic and the recovery effort. The recommendations provided in this is an evolving and meant only as a guide and to help you navigate a path forward that you might consider as you help your volunteers return to their service activities. As situations and circumstances are constantly shifting in communities and throughout the nation, and as more instructions from the federal offices come, AmeriCorps Seniors may be compelled to shift approaches and revise some of the information that we have included in this memo.

Please use as much or as little as you need to help develop a path forward for AmeriCorps Seniors programs and volunteers. We must safely reengage AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in their communities because our nation’s communities desperately need the services that they provide.

Additional Resources include:

- [Agency-wide and Senior Corps specific FAQs](#)

- [Steps for Obtaining Program Officer/ Portfolio Manager Approval for, and to Implement a Temporary Allowance to FGP and SCP Volunteers Who are not Able to Serve](#)
- [AmeriCorps Seniors Performance Measure- COVID](#)
- [COVID-19 Resource Tool Kit](#)

Please continue to leverage your Portfolio Manager for ongoing support.

Thank you for your dedication.

The AmeriCorps Seniors Team

Footnotes:

Note: All organizations that receive funding from the AmeriCorps to operate AmeriCorps Seniors Program are to follow their organizations written policies and procedures in consultation with their local and state official governments and health guidelines when it comes to safe volunteering.

Note: AmeriCorps Office of General Counsel has determined that grantees have flexibilities to create safe, social distancing service assignments for AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers that do not supplant or cause displacement of the grantees or service location staff persons. All grantees must also comply with program regulations as stated in:

- FGP regulation [45 CFR 2552.71](#)
- RSVP regulation [45 CFR 2553.51](#)
- SCP regulation [45 CFR 2551.71](#)

Note: Section 404(a) of the DVSA and AmeriCorps Seniors regulations at 45 CFR Part 1216, which apply to all three AmeriCorps Seniors programs, prohibit against supplanting hiring, displacing state and impairing service contracts.

Note: AmeriCorps Seniors FGP and RSVP grantees must comply with the Children Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, as amended (COPPA). [Link to resources on COPPA.](#)

Note: In September of 2020, CNCS rebranded its name. Although CNCS remains its legal name, CNCS now operates under the working name of AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps is now referred to as AmeriCorps Seniors.