



Pennsylvania State Service Plan 2022 – 2024

PennSERVE, Pennsylvania's state service commission, encourages, develops, and facilitates volunteerism and service. Each year, PennSERVE awards millions of dollars in federal funding to AmeriCorps programs. Through funding and support, PennSERVE engages Pennsylvania residents in strengthening our communities.

In 2021, PennSERVE is administering 27 AmeriCorps programs and planning grants that address community needs across the commonwealth. From K-12 education to COVID-19 response to workforce development, AmeriCorps programs supported by PennSERVE are embedded in communities and engaged in innovative solutions to significant challenges.

PennSERVE is a grantee and grantmaking partner of the AmeriCorps agency, the federal agency connecting individuals and organizations through service and volunteering to tackle the nation's most pressing challenges.

This State Service Plan is a vision and roadmap for service and volunteering in Pennsylvania; it provides priorities, strategies, and measurable goals for 2022 through 2024. To inform the plan, PennSERVE gathered information from national service programs within the commonwealth and interested members of the public through discussions and an online survey. An explanation of this public input is provided at the end of this document.

This State Service Plan builds on the work of the previous State Service Plan and will strengthen and grow service efforts throughout Pennsylvania. PennSERVE aims to embed principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion through every goal and strategy, building on this priority area from the previous State Service Plan. This plan includes both internal strategies and external collaborations. It relies on community-driven solutions and input.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, as Pennsylvanians grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, PennSERVE increased our support of AmeriCorps programs and developed new programs and initiatives in response to the coronavirus and its impacts. Moving into 2022, PennSERVE is continuing to increase the footprint of AmeriCorps across the commonwealth, taking advantage of opportunities through the American Rescue Plan Act and other federal and private initiatives meant to bolster AmeriCorps. As we continue through one of the most dynamic periods in PennSERVE's history, we embrace the State Service Plan as a living document. PennSERVE will stay nimble and responsive to opportunities and emerging needs.

The Plan is organized into two sections: Funding Priorities and Operational Priorities.

651 Boas Street, Room 1306 | Harrisburg, PA 17121-0750 | pennserve@pa.gov | www.dli.pa.gov/pennserve

Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

Funding Priorities

As PennSERVE’s core function is funding and supporting AmeriCorps programs, the priorities of this plan will be utilized in developing future funding opportunities and making funding decisions. While grant applicants will be considered across all issue areas, and AmeriCorps agency priorities will be integrated in grantmaking competitions, PennSERVE may prioritize funding of programs and planning grants that propose meeting needs in one or more of the following areas.

Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PreK-12 • College access and completion • Adult basic education
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Access to healthy food • Reducing alcohol and/or drug abuse • Ongoing health impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic
Economic Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving housing access for individuals and families experiencing homelessness • Workforce development
Education/Health/ Economic Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridging the digital divide and increasing technology access for underserved or under-connected communities • Empowering individuals and families, including youth and young adults, who are impacted by the juvenile and/or criminal justice system; efforts may include but are not limited to diversion, re-entry, and engaging credible messengers to provide or connect individuals with support, treatment, or other services.
Program Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs that strategically embed the workforce development of AmeriCorps members in program design • Programs that embed principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in program design • Programs that provide a living allowance above the minimum required by the federal AmeriCorps agency
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs that provide services in low-income and/or under-resourced communities without other AmeriCorps State programs. “Communities” may be defined as neighborhoods, cities or towns, counties, or regions.

Operational Priorities

Any number of strategies could be used to encourage, develop, and facilitate volunteerism and service. The following three priorities and strategies are responsive to community and stakeholder input and build on the strength of PennSERVE and the Pennsylvania service network.

Priority #1: Bolster the quantity and quality of AmeriCorps programming in Pennsylvania **Strategies & Indicators**

Increasing Community Impact

- Develop at least three new AmeriCorps programs or an intermediary program that increases AmeriCorps members serving in underserved areas of the commonwealth. Indicator: New AmeriCorps program(s) are operational in underserved areas of Pennsylvania by Fall 2024.
- Develop an AmeriCorps program that has a primary or secondary focus on disaster services, inclusive of public health. Indicator: A new disaster services AmeriCorps program is operational by Fall 2024.

Inspiring and Incubating Innovation

- Promote use of planning grants to intentionally engage community members/service recipients in program development. Indicator: Add community engagement criteria to planning grant applications no later than the 2023 – 2024 AmeriCorps Request For Applications (released Fall 2022).
- Request stakeholder input to develop and improve AmeriCorps and service programs. Indicator: Conduct at least one survey or listening session per calendar year of existing national service programs and organizations not affiliated with PennSERVE.
- Continually work to break down the power dynamic between PennSERVE and AmeriCorps programs. Indicator: In 2022, develop one or more working groups of commission staff and stakeholders to co-solve problems and create solutions.

Simplifying

- Eliminate unnecessary criteria in grant applications, reports, and other requirements. Indicator: Comparisons of PennSERVE documents with statutory and federal AmeriCorps agency requirements reveal that PennSERVE is not adding additional, duplicative, or unnecessary criteria on top of what is required.
- Regularly check and adjust the reading levels of PennSERVE documents. Indicator: The grade level of PennSERVE's Request For Applications is lower than the baseline of 13.0 in the 2021 RFA.
- Collect and document grant applicant questions and adjust materials to be responsive to frequently asked questions. Indicator: FAQ document compiled throughout the 2022 grant application process and used to inform the 2023 process.
- Advocate for simplicity with the federal AmeriCorps agency, particularly in practices not regulated by law (evaluation requirements, member enrollment procedures, duplicative information requests, etc.) Indicator: PennSERVE staff engage in working

groups to provide feedback to the agency; and submit public comments if and when appropriate.

Increasing Compliance

- Utilize planning grants and combination planning/program grants to put key structures in place for AmeriCorps program compliance (policies and procedures, National Service Criminal History Checks, enrollment, etc.). Indicator: By 2023, the majority of new programs are first awarded funds to support a planning and development period.
- Create an AmeriCorps Program Manager Guide/Toolkit to make program management more “press and play.” Indicator: Guide published by Fall 2022.
- Improve risk assessment tool to target high-risk areas in individual programs and provide front-end training and technical assistance to make realistic corrective actions. Indicator: PennSERVE’s monitoring plan includes specific monitoring and/or training and technical assistance strategies for high, medium, and low-risk programs by Fall 2023.

Priority #2: Strengthen the service infrastructure and ethic in Pennsylvania

Strategies & Indicators

Convening and Connecting

- Facilitate opportunities for national service programs to connect with each other through regional and cross-stream collaborations. Opportunities include facilitation of regional meetings and trainings, participation in the Philadelphia National Service Task Force (NSTF) and support of a possible re-launch of Service Leadership Pittsburgh; opportunities will engage AmeriCorps State, National, VISTA, and Seniors programs, as well as non-AmeriCorps service year programs. Indicator: PennSERVE facilitates at least six regional meetings per year and participates in meetings of the NSTF.
- Determine how PennSERVE should support AmeriCorps alums in Pennsylvania through a statewide chapter, regional chapters, mentoring, and/or other avenues. Indicator: Determination made and, if appropriate, a strategy in place by December 2023.

Building Capacity – of AmeriCorps and Volunteerism

- Conduct a study to determine best practices for staff to AmeriCorps member ratio, considering geographic reach and service site counts. Use recommended staff numbers to help programs, and program applicants, inform staffing needs and increase capacity. Indicator: Report published by Summer 2022.
- Conduct research of capacity needs of AmeriCorps programs and potential resources or solutions that can be implemented by PennSERVE. Indicator: Research conducted by December 2022; strategy developed by June 2023.
- In collaboration with the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations (PANO), facilitate volunteer management training for professionals engaged in volunteer

coordination at nonprofit organizations, schools, and government agencies. Indicator: Implement one session in 2022, two in 2023, and three in 2024.

- Explore PennSERVE’s role in supporting volunteer connector agencies and nonprofit organizations in communities without designated volunteer connector agencies. Indicator: By December 2023, develop a plan to amplify existing volunteer connection agencies and support organizations without local/regional connector agencies.

Building Awareness

- Facilitate in-person and virtual information sessions about AmeriCorps and funding opportunities. Indicator: At least four sessions facilitated per year beginning in 2022.
- Inform elected officials of AmeriCorps programming in their districts and when notices of funding opportunities are available. Indicator: Annual grant notification letters sent to US representatives in the summer; PennSERVE staff and/or board members participate in annual “Hill Days” to visit legislators.
- Improve PennSERVE’s external communications to recognize AmeriCorps and community volunteerism and to better reach partners, potential grant applicants, and other stakeholders. Indicator: Quarterly e-newsletter and/or consistent social media messaging in place by December 2022.
- Promote, recognize, and encourage strong AmeriCorps branding efforts by PennSERVE grantees. Indicator: PennSERVE monitoring plan includes an emphasis on branding by August 2022; and program branding best practices are highlighted in quarterly program calls.

Priority #3: Improve the AmeriCorps member experience

Strategies & Indicators

Making Service Accessible and Attractive

- Increase the Formula maximum cost per AmeriCorps member service year for all grants and encourage competitively-funded programs that engage opportunity youth to utilize the higher cost per member service year available in the federal notice of funding opportunity. Indicator: Revise the cost per MSY guidance in the 2022 – 2023 AmeriCorps Request For Applications.
- Make recommendations for appropriate living allowance amounts, based on a living wage. Indicator: Include guidance in the 2022 – 2023 AmeriCorps Request For Applications.
- Establish more employers with operations in Pennsylvania as “Employers of National Service.” Indicator: Increase over baseline of 53 employers as of 07/23/2021.
- Establish more Pennsylvania institutions of higher education as “Schools of National Service.” Indicator: Increase over baseline of 16 institutions (or schools within universities) as of 07/23/2021.
- Demonstrate AmeriCorps as a pipeline to careers by running a campaign showing AmeriCorps alums in government, the private sector, etc. Indicator: We Are AmeriCorps/Recruitment campaign running in one or more media platforms/outlets in 2022.

- Support AmeriCorps members in their search for service positions by making the search for Pennsylvania positions easier. Indicator: PennSERVE website revised with a focus on potential AmeriCorps members by June 2022.
- Provide opportunities for AmeriCorps programs to access additional training for AmeriCorps members through PennSERVE (e.g., AmeriCorps Week workshops, ongoing on-demand opportunities, trainer recommendations). Indicator: At least 75% of AmeriCorps members in PennSERVE-funded programs participate in one or more training opportunities annually.
- Determine whether PennSERVE should raise resources for AmeriCorps member emergency funds and/or increased living allowances; and what staff capacity is needed to engage in resource development. Indicator: Determination made and, if appropriate, fundraising strategy in place by December 2024.

Strengthening Workforce Development

- Run a campaign to support bureaus within the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry in understanding how AmeriCorps can benefit their missions and how their clients can connect to AmeriCorps. Indicator 1: information disseminated by Summer 2022. Indicator 2: One or more specific strategies for connecting clients to AmeriCorps in place by January 2023.
- As noted in Funding Priorities, prioritize funding programs and planning grants that strategically embed the workforce development of AmeriCorps members in program design. Indicator: Criteria included in the 2023-2024 Request for Applications.

Supplemental State Service Plan for Adults Age 55 and Older

- Continually explore opportunities for collaboration with AmeriCorps Seniors programs and program staff, such as inviting to PennSERVE training activities and encouraging mutually beneficial partnerships between AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors programs. Indicator: PennSERVE invites AmeriCorps Seniors program staff to events by sharing our annual Training and Collaboration Plan each summer; AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers participate in PennSERVE's annual AmeriCorps Week Conference and Celebration.
- Promote information on engaging older adults as volunteers and the health benefits of volunteering. Indicator: Information added to PennSERVE website by June 2022.
- Maintain a representative on the PennSERVE Advisory Board from a community organization serving older adults. Indicator: If this position is vacated, another individual with expertise in older adults is recruited within six months.
- Support AmeriCorps Seniors project development by promoting funding opportunities from the AmeriCorps agency and Mid-Atlantic Regional Office. Indicator: AmeriCorps Seniors funding opportunities shared in PennSERVE announcements when available.

Sate Service Plan Survey Summary

197 people completed all or part of the survey, representing all regions of the commonwealth, but with disparities in the response rates. For example, Northeast and Southcentral each represented 7% of respondents; Southeast had 47%. 42% of respondents live in urban communities, with rural and suburban evenly represented at about 27% each. All age groups over 18 were represented, ranging from 14% to 22%. One individual under 18 completed the survey. 9% of respondents identified as persons with a disability.

161 respondents identified their race and/or ethnic background. The statistics have some similarities to that of Pennsylvania at large with 78% White/European American, 11% Black/African American/Descendant of African Slaves, 5% Latina/Latino/LatinX/non-white, 5% Multiple Races, 5% self-identified, and less than 2% each of the other options listed. However, it is not known whether this sample is representative of PennSERVE's existing "customers" (AmeriCorps members, staff, and the communities in which Pennsylvania AmeriCorps programs serve). Respondents were more heavily female (71%) and less than 2% identified as gender expansive.

It is not surprising that nearly half (49%) of respondents are employed in the nonprofit sector. In addition, 16% represent academia and 14% were unemployed. For-profit and government employees represented 6% and 8%, respectively. 15% were students. Approximately half of all respondents are a participant, alum, staff, and/or board member of an AmeriCorps or Senior Corps program. 79% noted that they volunteer in their community.

Participants were asked to select three groups that need additional supports. The groups selected most often are:

- Low-income communities (68%)
- Children and youth aged 0-18 (54%)
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (40%)
- Adults aged 60+ (28%)

When asked to select the five most urgent needs facing their communities, seven of twenty were selected by 30% or more respondents:

- Education (52%)
- Mental Health (49%)
- Access to Healthy Food (41%)
- Improving Housing Access for individuals and families experiencing homelessness (36%)
- Youth Development (36%)
- Reducing Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse (34%)
- Workforce Development (34%)