



State Service Plan

2022-2025



AmeriCorps New Mexico



Overview

Three years ago, the State of New Mexico—and our nation—was at a very different place. The priorities of the Serve New Mexico Commission largely reflected that landscape, and the thought then that our lives could be appended by a global pandemic would have been the stuff of science fiction.

In 2022, we find the effects of COVID-19 still inhabiting our everyday lives: the health, economic, social and educational impacts beyond calculation.

Moreover, the social and political upheavals both locally and nationally have contributed to seeking remedies to divisiveness and injustice falls within the responsibilities of agencies serving the greater good, and the administration of public resources must be conducted with renewed focus on equity and inclusion.

For the Serve New Mexico Commission, the resources we are responsible for stewarding is AmeriCorps, the National Service vehicle to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. In meeting our responsibilities to the state and to our mission, the Serve New Mexico Commission has endeavored over the next three years to these goals outlined in the State Service Plan:

Commission Goals 2022–2025

Goal #1 Expand National Service: Effectively deploy formula funding to create and expand successful AmeriCorps programs in underrepresented areas of the state, in accordance with the Commission’s three-year funding priorities. This includes expanded outreach to Native communities and to rural areas of the State with a limited history of National Service presence.

Goal #2 Increase Access to Applicants: Make the National Service Experience more accessible to communities throughout New Mexico; utilize the expanded funding available to the Commission, work in partnership with the AmeriCorps Mountain Region Office of Regional Operations (ORO) and continue to simplify the Commission RFA and offer year-round technical assistance to operational and prospective programs.

Goal #3 Enhance the AmeriCorps Member Experience: Make AmeriCorps recruitment more successful statewide by advocating for an increased living stipend and removing taxes from the Segal Education award; building the state alumni network and establishing a clearly defined pathway within NMDWS from service to employment.

Goal #4 Empower Commissioners: Charge Commissioners with greater responsibility for serving as ambassadors in reaching out to their networks and communities to offer AmeriCorps resources.

Committee and Commission Board

Bernadine Dallago, Commission Chair

Barbara Armijo

Erin Atkins

Alicia Benavidez*

Jorja Armijo-Brasher

Chanelle Delgado

Alice Garza

Elaine Graff

Nancy Hughes

Charles Humiston

Laura Jagles

Justin Paul MacDonald*

Josefina Mata*

David A. Medrano

Matthew Montoya*

Alice Perez

Ryan Steinmetz

*State Service Plan Committee Member

Goal #5 Empower the Commission: Ensure the Commission has the administrative tools to effectively deliver and manage National Service resources. This includes ensuring that the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions secures General Fund matching dollars for adequate staffing, committing NMDWS Communications staff to a robust Commission Communications strategy, and engaging NMDWS leadership to liaison in support of AmeriCorps with the Governor’s office.

Mission and Principles

In accordance with federal legislation, the Serve New Mexico Commission (previously the New Mexico Commission for Community Volunteerism) was established through Executive Order No. 94-03 by Governor Bruce King in 1994. The Commission is administratively housed in the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions and is guided by a bipartisan citizen body appointed by the Governor, which includes representatives of business, labor, education, government, human service agencies, and community-based organizations.

The Serve New Mexico Commission engages New Mexicans of all ages and backgrounds in community-based service to address our state’s most pressing challenges—including education, the environment, public safety, health, and housing. The ultimate aim of the Commission is to achieve direct and meaningful improvements in New Mexico’s communities through AmeriCorps/National Service.

Our overarching commitment is to work hand-in-hand with community partners, focusing national service resources where the need is greatest.

As outlined in the federal National and Community Service Act of 1990, State Commissions exist as a mechanism for states to apply for and accept National Service grants. State commissions execute several key duties:

- Prepare a National Service plan for the state.
- Apply for the state’s AmeriCorps State and National (ASN) members.
- Provide recommendations on priorities for National Service programs.
- Make technical assistance available to program applicants and grantees.
- Develop and promote a state system for recruiting and placing participants in programs.
- Administer a statewide grant program that includes the selection, oversight, and evaluation of grant recipients.
- Develop projects, training methods, curricula, and other materials and activities related to National Service programs.

Our Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)

The Serve New Mexico Commission strives to represent all of the people and cultures of New Mexico. In our work and grantmaking, we prioritize principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. We are seeking dynamic partners who are committed to addressing the changing needs of our communities.

Our Commission will focus on recognizing and celebrating the differences that exist within us as New Mexicans. This may include seeking out specific cultures that are underrepresented within our Commission, grants, board, or partners. This requires promoting our differences, embracing them, and supporting them. It also means being willing and able to address and confront issues that might exist within our communities, culture, and systems.

Our Service Environment

The Serve New Mexico Commission is housed in the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions in recognition that national service is a pathway to employment in a state with currently the highest unemployment rate in the nation.

New Mexico is a largely rural state, with 33 counties and just over 2 million people; nearly 20% of the state lives in poverty, the third highest rate in the nation and New Mexico has the lowest income growth and smallest population aged 25 and under who have achieved a high school diploma or further education.

Historic challenges Facing the Commission have included:

- Identifying eligible agencies (nonprofits and state agencies/municipalities) that can successfully administer an AmeriCorps Grant;

- Struggling to fully allocate our Formula AmeriCorps dollars;
- Lack of awareness for AmeriCorps and National Service.

Recent Successes

With the previous State Service Plan (2019–2021), the Commission succeeded in meeting these significant goals and objectives:

- Reducing the AmeriCorps federal formula funds returned by 100%;
- Undergoing a rebranding effort that better represents the AmeriCorps opportunity.

Ongoing Challenges

- Increasing the number of operational AmeriCorps programs in New Mexico (currently at 12);
- Funding intermediary model programs in rural communities.

Recent Opportunities

In previous years, the Corporation for National and Community Service State Office and Serve New Mexico Commission mostly functioned independently; the State Office Coordinated VISTA and Senior Corps, the Commission oversaw AmeriCorps State and National (ASN) programs and Days of National Service, with little coordination of efforts.

With the establishment of AmeriCorps Regionalization in 2019 and the creation of the Mountain Region AmeriCorps Office based in Aurora, Colorado, collaboration around planning, outreach, and community education has become not only possible, but fully encouraged, with the belief that all streams of National Service should be mutually supportive, complementary, and part of a shared effort. With VISTA and NCCC, often first encounters with National Service, there is now a “pipeline” to deliver the AmeriCorps experience to counties and agencies (such as Lea County) where Commission funding is currently unallocated.

Public Health AmeriCorps, the 2022 partnership between AmeriCorps and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support the recruitment, training, and development of the next generation of public health leaders, also presented an expansion of AmeriCorps resources to three New Mexico subgrantees.

Still the challenges the Commission faces—in recruitment, promotion, reducing barriers for applicants and making AmeriCorps a more user-friendly, accessible opportunity for eligible institutions—are significant. While there’s no sure solution, this recent collaboration has been identified as key to the Commission’s success, alongside identifying state legislators who can help the Commission promote AmeriCorps opportunities in their districts, and enhanced by the long-delayed establishment of an AmeriCorps alumni network that can further offer champions.

Goal #1

Effectively deploy funding to create and expand successful AmeriCorps programs in underrepresented areas of the state in accordance with the Commission’s funding priorities.

How: Through continuing outreach efforts, and by collaboration and coordination with the Mountain Region Office of Regional Operations, the Commission will both identify eligible applicants for ASN opportunities and direct other potential long-term partners for VISTA, NCCC, and AmeriCorps Seniors opportunities as a precursor for ASN.

Operating an AmeriCorps program requires extensive planning and preparation. Successful AmeriCorps programs must be adept at managing complex federal grants, securing matching funds, recruiting, onboarding, and supervising AmeriCorps members, and designing programs that provide meaningful service.

The State Service Plan 2022–2025 recognizes that barriers identified in the previous State Service plan still remain:

- A complicated and lengthy application process—further encumbered by a web of reference documents laden with technical wording;
- Extensive reporting requirements and administrative burden.

The New Mexico Commission will continue to provide resources to organizations to address these barriers, utilizing Technical and Training Assistance/Commission Investment Funds (TTA/CIF)-funded resources to:

- Expand technical assistance through the Commission’s established network of consultants;
- Educate state agencies and local governments about accessing national service;
- Facilitate conversations with community-based organizations and nonprofits to develop evidence-based service strategies;
- Improve the efficiencies of existing national service programs in design, implementation, and compliance.

This includes expanded outreach to Native communities and to rural areas of the State with a limited history of National Service representation and offering year-round technical assistance to operational and prospective programs.

Goal #2

Through the American Rescue Plan, there is new funding available to support the expansion of AmeriCorps State and National programs in New Mexico:

- An additional \$2,120,593 in Formula funds for three years, effective December 1, 2021 to November 31, 2024;
- A process for current subgrantees to request supplemental American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds.
- The ability to provide cash match replacement funds.

While this is an exciting development, the capacity for many non-profits and state agencies to apply for this funding, given the complexities of the AmeriCorps application process, is a barrier to the equitable distribution of AmeriCorps Resources.

While it is incumbent on the National AmeriCorps agency to amend the core application process to reduce these barriers, the Commission will continue to work with the NMDWS office of general counsel to continue to simplify the Commission Request for Applications (RFA) to reduce the burden on applicants, especially in regards to easing state procurement requirements.

With our grantmaking, the Commission has learned the following:

- AmeriCorps is changing with the times; the agency is now looking at applications to make sure that funded programs are growing and maturing, and those changes are reflected in the application. Having shown excellency in the past does not assure future funding anymore;
- Programs that have been active for many years do not show signs of maturity on their applications;
- Leadership turnover impairs many programs. Vested leader leaves; the knowledge and /or enthusiasm is not passed over to the new leadership;
- Good programs on the ground need to grow and push for higher levels of achievement, and exhibit maturity in their application and outcomes and internal evaluation;
- Commission planning grants are successful in revealing if the applicant has interest, understanding, and administrative capacity to be successful. Putting resources into planning grants are cost savings in the long run for AmeriCorps and NMDWS.

The Commission will continue to offer planning grants to eligible applicants, with the explicit requirement that the totality of the planning grant award be used to engage a consultant committed to the successful execution of a year-long planning process that will lead to an operational program application.

The Intermediary Model

Reporting and administrative requirements are a real challenge for smaller organizations that lack a robust infrastructure—both internally and externally, especially for New Mexico’s many impoverished rural communities. A proven best practice in overcoming this barrier is the intermediary (aka, “hub” or “consortia”) approach to programming. In this model, an organization with sufficient administrative capacity shares its AmeriCorps programming with several smaller organizations, pooling their limited resources under one diverse consortium. These multi-focused hubs carry the added benefit of addressing rural communities’ human and infrastructure needs more holistically—an approach that’s also mirrored in the Governor’s rural development priority.

Agencies applying as a Rural Intermediary will receive an additional four points. Applicants seeking consideration under this priority must demonstrate that they will be serving in rural, severely under-resourced communities; that their application represents a consortium; that the activities provided by the consortium collectively address a compelling community need or set of needs; and that they have sufficient financial and management capacity to act as an umbrella organization for the consortium.

Recognizing the difficulties in applying for and managing an AmeriCorps grant, the Commission may consider an RFB (Request for Bids) process for a third-party contractor to successfully manage a consortium of subgrantees.

Increasing Commission Visibility

Despite a rebranding undertaken by the AmeriCorps agency in 2019, “AmeriCorps” is still largely unknown to potential partners who aren’t already engaged in National Service programming.

How: To address the lack of awareness surrounding AmeriCorps’ language and branding, the New Mexico Commission will pursue a four-pronged strategy:

1. Continuing statewide engagement and awareness sessions in coordination with the AmeriCorps Mountain Region Office;
2. Leveraging AmeriCorps alumni as champions of National Service and;
3. Deploying Commissioners to provide education and outreach to the communities and agencies they were appointed to represent.
4. Increasing the Commission’s social media presence and engaging the support of the New Mexico Broadcasters Association in spotlighting the impact of New Mexico AmeriCorps programs.

Goal #3

The low living stipend AmeriCorps members receive allows those with economic supports to serve—and excludes those who are entirely dependent on the stipend to live. Unsurprisingly, the low amount of the stipend has been identified as a primary barrier to service throughout the nation—and is the most pressing threat to the recruitment of members and the continuation of National Service.

How: The Commission will advocate on behalf of members and programs for an increased living award. This will involve collecting evidence of how prospective members are declining service opportunities and presenting the evidence to AmeriCorps agency leadership and members of New Mexico’s Congressional Delegation in the hopes that a blanket increase of the award can be achieved.

This effort will be complemented by Commission advocacy for removing taxes from the Segal education award as described by the advocacy coalition, Voices for National Service:

Every AmeriCorps member who completes a term of service receives a Segal AmeriCorps education award that may be used to pursue a future degree or to pay back existing, qualified student loans. But that award is treated differently than many similarly purposed federal fellowship and scholarship programs—including Pell Grants, the GI Bill Benefit, and the National Health Service Corps. The AmeriCorps education award is subject to federal taxation after it is used.

The tax on the AmeriCorps education awards has significant practical implications. Because the award is sent directly to the institution of higher education or to the student loan lender, AmeriCorps alumni are not able to use a portion of the award to pay the resulting tax. This creates an unexpected tax burden on the dedicated Americans who commit to serving the country through AmeriCorps. It’s essentially a tax on service.

The Commission will seek Congressional support for Segal AmeriCorps Education Award Tax Relief measures. Furthermore, recognizing that the need for the Education Award may be less urgent for New Mexicans served by the Opportunity Scholarship, the Commission will promote alternative and non-traditional uses for the Segal award.

Additional tasks:

1. Amend the Commission bylaws to create an AmeriCorps Alumni Board representative seat on the Commission Board by 2023;
2. Creation of an Executive Committee position to support the alumni network efforts and provide ongoing engagement opportunities for AmeriCorps advocacy and promotion;
3. Enter AmeriCorps alumni into the WIOA Workforce Connection Online System database to provide career employment services and track post-service employment for at least three years;
4. Use AmeriCorps alumni to recruit prospective members and sites;
5. Host quarterly alumni events, such as networking socials, job fairs, and employment skill trainings.
6. Engage alumni in legislative initiatives, such as making New Mexico an Employer of National Service and one-for-one matching scholarships for AmeriCorps alumni;
7. Work with the Governor’s Office to sponsor a statewide Member Recognition event.

Goal #4

Charge Commissioners with greater responsibility for serving as emissaries in reaching out to their networks and communities to offer AmeriCorps resources.

How: Commission Board members have been asked to be actively engaged in being “ambassadors” for the commission and State Service Plan priorities. With their demonstrated strong and authentic commitment to the Commission’s JEDI focus, particularly around acknowledgement and celebration of Native/Indigenous and Hispanic representation imbedded in New Mexico culture, as well as an investment in disability inclusion, Commissioners also have a vision, connection to many agencies (state, nonprofit, etc.) and responsibility to promote National Service opportunities to their constituencies. Over the next three years, all Commissioners will be responsible for:

1. Serving on at least one Commission committee;
2. Delivering an AmeriCorps presentation to at least one agency or non-profit organization;
3. Serving as a Peer Reviewer for one of the Commission’s two Request for Applications (RFA) processes.

Goal #5

Empower the Commission with the administrative tools to effectively deliver and manage AmeriCorps resources.

How: While the pandemic has overwhelmed the Commission’s “parent agency,” the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, it is hoped that as pandemic impacts to the economy and job market subside over time, the Commission can engage its NMDWS partner to support innovative campaigns to drive recruitment of both AmeriCorps members and eligible grant applicants. This includes:

- Ensuring that there is General Fund support for appropriate Commission staffing;
- Properly administering the two-percent administrative fee charged to all subgrantee grants to offset increased Commission staffing, including the Fiscal Coordinator position introduced in 2022;
- A robust Communications strategy that leads to website improvements and overcoming state system firewall probations on social media access to improve AmeriCorps awareness in the state.

2022–2025 Funding Priorities

Over the next three years, the Commission will seek to prioritize funding in the following areas:



COVID-19 Recovery Efforts. Efforts to help local communities respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Applicants may propose programming to aid communities in their efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, including outcomes of COVID-19 on student subgroups described in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.



Learning Loss Interventions. Programs that seek improved academic performance in literacy and/or math using a pre and post-test to compare the skill improvement.



Tribal Outreach. Increasing National Service opportunities within 23 Federally Recognized Tribes in New Mexico Counties.



Educational Opportunity and Economic Mobility. Educational opportunity and economic mobility for communities experiencing persistent unemployment or underemployment, and students experiencing homelessness or those in foster care.



Rural Intermediaries. Organizations that demonstrate measurable impact and primarily serve rural communities with limited resources and organizational infrastructure.

Native/Tribal Outreach

Native American/Tribal outreach is both a Commission funding priority and an objective of the Commission's larger JEDI goals.

The relevance of AmeriCorps to Indian communities in New Mexico is largely unknown, despite their being a set-aside (1% of the AmeriCorps budget plus ARP funds) for federally recognized tribes. The Commission recognizes that our messaging to Tribal entities needs to be improved—along with offering specific, tangible examples of the impact of successful AmeriCorps interventions in Tribal Communities throughout the country, which should be conveyed in a dedicated section of the Commission website.

The New Mexico Department of Indian Affairs has expressed a willingness to be an intermediary in managing an AmeriCorps grant, as the demands of grant compliance exceeds tribal capacity; an “intermediary manager” is therefore needed; a tribal-serving non-profit entity could also manage a program.

As tribal communities have existing senior, educational, and environmental programs, the Commission will identify and contact those staff people who are already working on such grants. The ability and obligation for Tribes to recruit their own members needs to be emphasized.

The Commission should also re-engage with NM Department of Aging Long-Term Services Division on a service intervention, as isolated Native seniors is a significant consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Growing the Indigenous educator's pipeline, as represented by the Commission's support of the Indigenous Educators Corps program with NACA-Inspired Schools Network, should also be a Commission investment.

To incentivize Programs Serving Tribal and Native American Communities, applicants proposing AmeriCorps interventions that specifically address critical issues unique to tribal and Native American communities in New Mexico currently receive an additional four points in the Commission's RFAs.

Additional Commission Strategies

The Commission will also adopt the following strategies:

Advance Outreach to Schools: Engaging year-round with schools on funding opportunities—efforts should start in September well before an RFA is open; working with New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) and the School Board Association on tailored AmeriCorps workshops should be considered;

Intergenerational programs: National Service programs can bring together older and younger people to serve side by side, producing a windfall of human and social capital, plus much-needed generational and cultural understanding.

Adjust and expand our current portfolio: Our Commission needs to be prepared to help current subgrantees adapt to new agency priorities such as Climate Corps, and new Out of School Time (OST) initiatives. We may see opportunities to create partnerships based on these new initiatives, e.g., with the Outdoor Recreation Division to provide outdoor equity opportunities for Black and Indigenous youth.

Outreach to Sister State Agencies: The Commission will coordinate efforts with the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) for possible member deployments during emergency situations including wildfires.