

Service Site FAQs



Q: What's the difference between an AmeriCorps member and an employee?

A: AmeriCorps is a national service organization. It is not a job placement organization. Although ECO AmeriCorps members may have advanced skills and education relating to their service, they are not required to be experienced national resource professionals. Members are not employees, nor are they volunteers. They do not receive wages for their service. Instead they receive a modest living allowance throughout their service. Members also receive a monetary education award upon the successful completion of their service. Members are required to participate in monthly ECO AmeriCorps trainings and other organizational activities throughout the service year away from their assigned service sites. Although a bachelor's degree is not required for participation in the program, ECO AmeriCorps seeks to recruit members who have at least a bachelor's degree, demonstrate a commitment to improving the environment, have an interest and experience in water quality and/or waste management-related issues, and demonstrate a commitment to national service. For the right candidate, we will also consider other qualifications.

Q: What are the supervision needs of a member? What if my organization only has a home office? What if there is no paid director staff position?

A: Successful supervision and support is crucial to ensuring a mutually beneficial experience for the member and the service site. AmeriCorps requires members to have an office space, desk, computer, and access to a phone. Supervisors must be paid staff members of the service site and meet regularly (at least once a week) with the member, in addition to providing orientation to the service site and service duties. Board members may not serve as a site supervisor. As mentioned in FAQ #1, ECO AmeriCorps members are selected based on their ability to successfully serve at their service site. However, members are not employees and may have different supervisory needs than employees. With different organizational needs in mind, ECO AmeriCorps is open to the possibility of service site partnerships with more than one organization. If you have a partner organization identified, please see FAQ #13. Members must receive and understand any additional organizational policies pertinent to their service with partner organizations.

Q: My organization is interested in hosting an ECO AmeriCorps member. What are the next steps?

A: The service site application, position description template, and performance goals are available on our website: <http://ecoamericorps.vermont.gov>

Q: What is the deadline for applying?

A: The deadline for member applications and service site applications is Wednesday, March 1, 2023. If all service sites have not been selected by March 1, applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. We plan to have service site selections finalized by mid-April.

Q: How will applications be scored, and service sites selected?

A: A team will review each application. Applications will be scored based on the following criteria:

- Familiarity with service/experiential learning programs
- Community priority needs
- Contribution to CNCS program metrics
- Organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives
- Member experience
- Supervisor qualifications
- Building organizational capacity

There will be a clarification period during which program staff may work with service sites to revise application materials before final selection is completed. Prior experience as an AmeriCorps service site is not required.

Q: When will the service begin?

A: The 2023-2024 service year begins September 13, 2023, and concludes August 9, 2024. We plan to have finalized member/host site pairings with members committed to their service sites by mid-June.

Q: What can make my application stand out?

A: ECO AmeriCorps seeks service sites with projects that put their organization on the path to long-lasting results that could not be achieved without the use of a member.

Q: How much is the service site match and how is it paid?

A: For full time members (1700 hours over 11 months)

- \$7,500 contribution per 0-3 full-time employees
- \$8,400 contribution per 4-10 full-time employees
- \$9,800 contribution for greater than 10 employees

Half-Time (900 hours over 6 months)

- \$4,900 regardless of size

Quarter-Time (450 hours over 3 months)

- \$2,450 regardless of size

Service sites can pay this monetary match to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as a lump-sum at the start of service or via quarterly payments. More information about payment will be provided when service sites are selected.

Q: Who pays the member?

A: DEC pays the member's living stipend and mileage reimbursement as it relates to DEC-trainings and gatherings. AmeriCorps health insurance is available to members. The service site pays the member's mileage reimbursement for mileage related to the member's service work. The service site also is responsible for any materials and equipment needed to accomplish service work, including office space and a computer.

Q: Do you run a background check on members, and can you share the results with us?

A: AmeriCorps mandates a background check for every enrolled member, and each member's identity is checked within the National Sex Offender Registry. While we cannot share the results of a background check, members unable to pass a background check will not be placed in ECO AmeriCorps. Discretion must be given for members working with vulnerable populations (children, seniors, and disabled individuals). If the member you seek will be working with vulnerable populations on a regular basis, please identify this in your service site application. Any previous criminal history not previously disclosed on the member application counts as a falsified statement and disqualifies the member from service.

Q: Can a federal agency apply for a member? Can members serve in federal buildings?

A: Yes. Federal agencies may apply for a member, and members can serve in federal buildings. If extra background checks are required, the service site is responsible for that cost, and suitable accommodations must be made while awaiting background check results. Please be clear if you need a longer matching process for this purpose.

Q: Can federal funds be used for the service site match?

A: Yes, federal funds can be used for the service site match, as long as the federal grantor gives explicit permission (in writing) for funds to be used in such a way.

Q: Can a service site share a member with another organization?

A: Partnerships between two service sites to supervise one member are possible. This can be a great way to share limited resources and ensure a member has ample service projects. In these partnerships, one organization must be identified as the primary service site, and one person at the primary service site must be identified as the member's primary supervisor. Partner sites must ensure that there is sufficient supervision for the member when serving away from their primary service site. The member should know who to report to at all times; one supervisor must be regularly approving timesheets; and there must be a clear line of communication between ECO AmeriCorps, the member, and the supervisors at both service sites. If you are interested in sharing a member with another organization, please outline the partnership in your service site application.

Q: Who is responsible for liability insurance?

A: If injured "on the job" during service, members will be covered under the state's worker's compensation policy. General liability will fall to the service site, and you should treat that person in your policy as you do other volunteers.

Q: Is there a position description template?

A: Yes. There is a template available on our website. Please utilize it to craft your position description in the host site application.

Q: What will the matching process look like?

A: ECO AmeriCorps receives all member applications directly. We pre-screen applicants through in-person or Zoom interviews to determine if they are a good fit for the program. During the interviews we discuss each available position with them based on their geographic preference, skills, interests, and background.

We then preliminarily place members with service sites. ECO AmeriCorps provides service sites with the selected member's application packet and provides the prospective member with the service site position description and application information. Each site supervisors then conducts an interview with their prospective member.

Following this interview, service sites and prospective members have a few days to determine if this is a mutually good fit before an official placement is made. If it's a match, we send a service agreement to both members and host sites. If the service site and/or prospective member determines that it is not a good fit, ECO AmeriCorps will attempt to identify an alternate service site placement for the member and an alternate member for the service site, but this is not guaranteed.

This process has worked very well for our program, our partner sites, and our members. It ensures that we fill each position with a qualified applicant, helps establish a connection not only between the member and their host site but also between the member and ECO AmeriCorps, and ensures that members are aware of all AmeriCorps requirements and expectations. We aim to have all members assigned to service sites by mid-June.

Q: Can I have certain individuals apply for my position?

A: Yes. If you know of someone that you think could be a good fit for your position, encourage them to apply with mention of your organization. While we cannot guarantee that any one person will be placed in any specific organization or municipality, we will make considerations to any request made in the matchmaking process. This includes geographic requests.

Q: If I am selected to be a service site but don't see a fit with the applicant sent to me, am I obligated to take that member?

A: No, as mentioned in FAQ #16 you are not obligated to accept the member selected for you to interview. Our ultimate goal is to have good matches for both service sites and members. If you choose not to accept the applicant we have pre-selected, however, it is not guaranteed that another applicant will be selected for you to interview.

Q: Can a member be used for capacity building?

A: The general answer is yes, but the primary emphasis of a service position should relate back to direct service activities. The more your member's activities reflect the position description you have in place for water quality improvement/waste minimization, the better. AmeriCorps allows 10% of a member's time to be spent fundraising. Within fundraising, grant writing, event planning, and mailings are acceptable with some limitations. Grants applied for can only benefit service sites, not the AmeriCorps program (ECO AmeriCorps) or the member, and they must be directly related to projects, not general operational expenses for the organization.

Other acceptable capacity-building activities include: education and outreach, data collection and analysis, research, volunteer generation and management, and communications and public relations.

Note: Outreach/education in an attempt to get landowners and farmers to adopt a practice that benefits the public is acceptable. An ECO AmeriCorps member's service must serve the public interest. An AmeriCorps member's service shall not be seek to result in profits for individuals or other businesses.

If you have questions about allowable activities, please contact us.

Q: Are there prohibited activities?

A: Yes, in addition to the limit on the type of fundraising and number of fundraising (no more than 10% of total hours served) and training (no more than 20% of total hours served) hours a member can complete, members are also prohibited from participating in solely administrative tasks such as making copies, sending out mailings, etc. unless these activities are directly related to the member's service.

AmeriCorps also lists various activities that members are prohibited from counting in their hours of service and participating in while in AmeriCorps service. However, these activities are allowed on a member's personal time.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES - An approved national service position may not be used for the following activities:

- (1) Attempting to influence legislation.
- (2) Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes.
- (3) Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing.
- (4) Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements.
- (5) Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to Federal office or the outcome of an election to a State or local public office.
- (6) Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials.
- (7) Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of proselytization, consistent with section 132.
- (8) Providing a direct benefit to any—
 - (A) business organized for profit;

(B) labor union;

(C) partisan political organization;

(D) nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, except that nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and

(E) organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (7), unless the position is not used to support those religious activities.

(9) Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services.

(10) Conducting a voter registration drive or using Corporation funds to conduct a voter registration drive.

Q: Who can I contact for more information?

A: Email us at anr.ecoamericorps@vermont.gov