

Written Testimony by Wendy Spencer Before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

“Call to Action: VA Outreach and Community Partnerships”

April 24, 2013

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Wendy Spencer, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). I have had the privilege of serving in this role since April 2012, following my nomination by President Obama and unanimous confirmation by the U.S. Senate. I thank the Members of this Committee for your faith and confidence in me and for this honor you have entrusted to me.

I have forged my career in volunteer management and administration over the past three decades. Prior to this appointment, I served as CEO of the Florida Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Service under Governors Bush, Crist, and Scott, and am therefore honored to be the first CEO of CNCS to come directly from the national service field. I am also honored to be the first in this position to testify before this full Committee.

I was grateful for your invitation and am here today because CNCS shares your commitment to serving our veterans and military families. As a nation, we are tasked to meet the needs of the 1.5 million service members hanging up their uniforms for the last time and transitioning to civilian life in the next five years, as well as the military families who have borne so much of the burden during the long and protracted years of war.

The good news I have to report is that Americans have answered the call to serve in countless ways to support our military service men and women, veterans, and their families. As the Obama Administration's Joining Forces initiative makes clear, this is not a challenge for government, alone; it is a challenge for all of us who live safer, freer, and more secure because of the sacrifice of these heroes. National service is an innovative, cost-effective, and proven solution to this challenge.

During my testimony, I will discuss who we are, our commitment to our nation's heroes, and how national service is poised to play an even greater role in helping our returning service members and their families transition back to civilian life.

ABOUT THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

CNCS is a federal agency that engages millions of Americans in service each year through our signature national service programs, AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, and innovative programs such as the Social Innovation Fund and Volunteer Generation Fund that take community-based

solutions to scale. We also lead the President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve.

Our programs bring human capital to America's civic infrastructure. This includes more than:

- 80,000 AmeriCorps members;
- 330,000 Senior Corps volunteers; and
- 4.5 million community volunteers recruited, managed, and mobilized by our national service members and call to service initiatives.

We are unique in that we are a public-private partnership. We work with a vast network of grantees and partners to get things done in communities across the country. And we generate the investment of hundreds of millions in private and non-CNCS funds every year.

Through our AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs, dedicated citizens of all ages and backgrounds are serving hands-on and in many cases full-time at 70,000 locations nationwide, including schools, faith- and community-based organizations, state and local public agencies, and venerable nonprofits such as Points of Light, Habitat for Humanity, American Red Cross, United Way, Catholic Charities, and the American Legion Auxiliary.

Every day, these national service members tackle complex societal challenges on the ground, such as helping youth stay on track to graduate; fighting poverty; responding to disasters; restoring parks; bringing life back to forgotten neighborhoods; and connecting veterans and military families to the services they need and the benefits they have earned, which is the challenge that unites us here today. It's working; we see results of national service each and every day.

National service is based on the idea that our nation's greatest asset is our citizens. When Americans are civically engaged and empowered, no challenge is insurmountable. That is why CNCS is proud to lead the federal effort to support, strengthen, and scale America's volunteer sector through national service, and help address some of the most pressing issues facing our nation.

NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE COMMITMENT TO VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

As the Members of this Committee and the witnesses of this panel know, one such pressing national issue is meeting the needs of our transitioning military and their families. I am the wife, daughter, granddaughter, and stepmother of men who have served our country in four branches of the military, so this is very personal to me and I understand the challenge.

Further, this generation of American veterans presents new challenges which are uniquely served by national service members, volunteers, and fellow veterans and military family members.

The bipartisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 (Serve America Act) was landmark legislation that focused national service on key national priorities, including veterans

and military families. In the spirit and the letter of the Serve America Act, the CNCS 2011-2015 Strategic Plan set goals, strategies, and objectives to support the veteran and military family community.

Our commitment to veterans and military families begins in large part by who we choose to lead our efforts. In 2011, we chose a two-tour combat veteran of Kosovo and Iraq, and the recipient of the Bronze Star, Koby Langley, as Senior Advisor for Wounded Warrior, Veteran, and Military Family Initiatives at CNCS. Koby has served our country with distinction as a public servant in the Army, as a special assistant to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and most recently as a senior executive in the Department of Defense (DoD) where he advised on wounded warrior and transition policy, led in the interagency development of the Veterans Job Bank, as well as the first ever DoD wounded warrior employment initiative. Today, our investments in supporting the veteran and military family community have never been stronger.

Our commitment to this community is twofold. We directly serve veterans and their families through national service, and we recruit and enroll veterans and their families to serve in national service programs. We have seen success on both fronts.

Serving Veterans and Military Families Through National Service

Our AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers, serving at the community level, are the face and helping hands of a grateful nation. These national service members serve at hundreds of Department of Veterans (VA) Affairs facilities, including clinics, community centers, and 80 hospitals; veteran service organizations; and nonprofits such as Blue Star Families and Operation Homefront.

They perform a wide range of service activities on a daily basis to support veterans and their families, including raising awareness of benefits among veterans and helping them navigate the application process; connecting them to critical wellness and support services such as legal assistance, health care, job training, and affordable housing; or providing transportation to the nearest VA hospital or other medical appointments, to job counseling or interviews, and to take care of personal needs by running household errands.

Examples of our grantees in action include:

- Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, Nebraska, which utilizes the anti-poverty, capacity-building arm of AmeriCorps – AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) – to help veterans and their families transition from a life in the military to a life in the classroom. The VISTA members have set up resource guides and a website specifically for student veterans, compiled a list of faculty members with military experience, and facilitated the student veterans’ transition to the local community through service events such as the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance.
- The City of Raleigh, North Carolina, which places two AmeriCorps VISTA members at the Raleigh Business and Technology Center. These VISTAs wrote, submitted, and were awarded an \$851K grant from the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the

Workforce Development Commission. The grant supports a cross-sector collaboration with the largest solar panel company in the state, providing veterans access to a 144-hour Solar Electrical Technician Certification Course, a Lineman Certification Course, a 200-hour pre-apprentice program, and support with transportation and job placements. This partnership is creating a pathway to education, green jobs, and transportation assistance for approximately 200 veterans.

- The LifeBridge Veteran AmeriCorps program in West Virginia, which provides peer-to-peer mentoring, life and job skills training, information and referral services, as well as financial literacy guidance to veterans, homeless individuals, or those at risk of becoming homeless. The program has been critical to helping fill gaps in resources for the state's veteran population. Last year, AmeriCorps members serving in the LifeBridge program drove documented increases in job skills among the population they served, recruited hundreds of volunteers, and provided direct support services to 200 members of the veteran and military family community in West Virginia.

Through these and other programs, last year approximately 1.5 million veterans and military family members across every state were impacted by the service of AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers. Since implementation of the Serve America Act over the past three years, CNCS has awarded national service grants to more than 240 organizations in more than 400 communities across the country to serve the veteran and military family community.¹ CNCS and our national service programs are developing good ideas, promising practices, and effective programs and initiatives that make a meaningful difference for veterans and military families and taking them to scale. This includes:

- The Community Blueprint, which began as collaboration between AmeriCorps VISTA members working with the American Legion Auxiliary, and has since grown into a multi-state initiative led by our grantee, the Points of Light.
- Operation Honor Card, which has solicited and documented pledges of 25.8 million hours of service by Americans in support of veterans and military families. Operation Honor Card is a joint project of the CNCS, Blue Star Families, American Red Cross, Points of Light, and ServiceNation. With more than 22.4 million of these service hours having already been served, Operation Honor Card has raised awareness of the strength and challenges of our service members and represents the commitment of communities and citizens nationwide who have come together to assist veterans and military families by writing letters of appreciation, sending care packages, hosting donation drives, organizing welcome home events, feeding homeless veterans, tutoring and mentoring military children, and much more.
- A new partnership with Delaware Governor Jack Markell, chairman of the National Governors Association, and the National Guard Bureau, which will place AmeriCorps members in Delaware and locations across the country as part of Joining Community

¹ A complete list of veteran and military family-oriented grantees supported since 2010 is provided as an appendix to this testimony.

Forces. The partnership will strengthen National Guard support services for guardsmen and their families at risk of homelessness, joblessness, or otherwise in need of economic stability assistance by providing access to AmeriCorps VISTA members for all 54 states and territories. I was proud to join the Governor and Senators Carper and Coons last month to announce this partnership.

Recruiting and Enrolling Veterans and Military Families in National Service

National service is also a unique and effective way to tap the talent and leadership skills of veterans to solve problems at home.

More than 17,000 veterans have served in AmeriCorps since its inception in 1994. And last year alone, more than 26,000 veterans served through Senior Corps. Veterans bring the skills they acquired in the service to continue serving on the homefront through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps - responding to disasters, building homes, mentoring at-risk youth, and supporting other veterans and their families.

Veterans of all ages have demonstrated a desire to serve their country both in and out of the service and this continues to be true for our youngest generation of veterans. A landmark report by Civic Enterprises found that younger veterans are eager to continue serving, and that veterans who volunteer have more successful transitions home than those who do not.²

This is proven true in national service programs. In a recent VISTA member exit survey, 80 percent of members reported that their participation in national service helped them reconnect with community activities in civilian life.³

Further, our national service field research shows that veterans and their families are more likely to accept assistance offered by an individual affiliated with the military than a well-intentioned civilian⁴, so this distinctive national service model – Vets helping Vets – has seen tremendous success.

Examples of our grantees in action include:

- The Washington state Vet Corps, an innovative program launched in 2009 by the Washington Commission for National and Community Service and the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, which engages veterans and military family members in AmeriCorps to support and boost the graduation rates of student veterans enrolled under

² *All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*. Civic Enterprises. Published November 2009.

³ *VISTA Member Exit Survey: September 2011-November 2012*. Survey results and testimonials of veterans serving in VISTA are provided as an appendix to this testimony.

⁴ *Understanding the Involvement of Veterans and Military Families in National Service*. A field assessment report prepared for the Corporation for National and Community Service by Westat. February 2013.

the post-9/11 GI Bill. Last year, the 31 members in Washington's VetCorps served 7,100 veterans across the state. Nine out of every 10 (93 percent) of the veterans they served reported that, because of VetCorps, they better understand how to use their VA benefits and how to navigate the college environment. And early results show that VetCorps members have substantially boosted the number of veterans on track to graduate from college.

- Formative nonprofits serving the veteran community such as the Mission Continues, Service Nation, and Team Rubicon, which have leveraged national service to expand their service model and to highlight veterans as civic assets and leaders in their communities. For example, after a 20 year military career, Ernest "Cal" Verdin is now an AmeriCorps VISTA member serving as a Regional Director of Team Rubicon. In response to Hurricane Sandy, Cal led the volunteer management efforts in Rockaway, New York, which included approximately 300 Team Rubicon volunteers and 10,000 community volunteers in recovery efforts over a five-week period.
- The Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), which in partnership with the National Guard Bureau's Prevention, Treatment, and Outreach Program, launched its own VetCorps to fight substance abuse, addiction, and other challenges facing returning veterans. According to the DoD Millennium Cohort Study, 22 percent of National Guard members were problem drinkers and 29 percent had financial problems. The CADCA VetCorps program places AmeriCorps members, particularly military service personnel and veterans, in CADCA's substance abuse prevention coalitions throughout the country to mitigate these problems. More than 100 AmeriCorps members will deploy to support returning guardsmen and reservists as they face behavioral health challenges.
- The Southwest Conservation Corps, which provides opportunities for veterans to serve as team leaders maintaining and responding to wild-fires on national lands, and launched an all-Veterans Fire Corps in 2010. As an AmeriCorps member in the Corps, Mike Bremer worked in three districts of the San Juan National Forest and for the New Mexico Bureau of Land Management. He showed stellar performance and leadership, was recognized nationally as Corps Member of the Year, and was promoted to a crew leader – a precursor to his now full-time job as a firefighter with the U.S. Forest Service. Mike explained, "When I returned from Iraq with the Army Infantry, I felt like I lost all meaning and purpose in life and I had trouble finding meaningful work. My Corps experience gave me new purpose and a valuable new skillset. I received incredible training and experience alongside other veterans who had similar experiences – we were all looking for a new life after war."

Through these and other programs, national service engages veterans and their families in a new mission on the home front.

Recognizing the unique skills and leadership abilities of America's veterans, as well as the benefits of national service to veterans and military families, CNCS and our network of grantees have stepped up our efforts to recruit these heroes to serve in our programs. We have partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to participate in more than 50 "Hiring Our Heroes" job fairs across the country. Additionally, a number of AmeriCorps grantees, including

Teach for America, Volunteers of America, the Washington Conservation Corps, and the St. Bernard Project, have launched veteran recruiting efforts for their AmeriCorps positions, and in some cases reserved positions specifically for veterans.

NATIONAL SERVICE WORKS FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

National service works for veterans and their families. It is an innovative, cost-effective, and proven solution to many of the challenges facing our nation's heroes, from accessing benefits and services to utilizing the post-9/11 GI Bill to reintegrating to civilian life.

As referenced earlier in this testimony, CNCS has provided historic levels of support to the military community in recent years. Yet we have still not fully realized the potential of national service to meet this pressing need. As the federal agency charged with expanding impactful, community-based solutions to serve veterans and military families, we are poised to do more to continue and expand our efforts to serve and engage veterans.

CNCS' unique value is a "triple bottom line" return on investment: National service benefits those who serve, those who are served, and the larger community and nation. We have:

- **Capability:** We are the only federal agency with access to such a vast network of grantees, community-based partners, national service members, and volunteers that improve the lives of Americans every day.
- **Authority:** The bipartisan Serve America Act gave us the authority and expectation to expand services to veteran and military families and coordinate activities with the VA and other federal agencies.
- **Accountability:** CNCS is committed to the highest level of accountability through oversight of our grantees and national service participants, as well as by using performance measures and evaluations to ensure that our programs have real and quantifiable impact.
- **Ability to Leverage Non-Federal Resources:** Our grants to nonprofits, schools, and other community-based organizations are often required to be matched with funding from local, private, and non-CNCS partners. And our national service members mobilize millions of community volunteers alongside them.

The success of CNCS and our national service members is beyond measure in both the lives of the individuals and communities they serve and those who commit to serving. We recognize that service members, veterans, and their families face unique challenges and we believe CNCS has a cost-effective model efficiently serving many of their needs. We also understand there is more to do and know that with a fully funded interagency service Corps, we could provide support services to even more service members, veterans, and their families. An example of this is FEMA Corps, a partnership between CNCS and FEMA that created a specialized unit of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps. This partnership is projected to save FEMA and taxpayers more than \$60 million per year. Additionally, CNCS and the Department of

Education launched School Turnaround AmeriCorps to place AmeriCorps members in persistently underachieving schools across the country. With these models we are in discussions with several federal agencies – including VA – to help them accomplish their mission through national service.

The CNCS commitment to veterans and military families has never been greater, and we stand ready to do more. We look forward to working with this Committee, the VA, and other partners across every sector that are committed to serving our veterans and their families as well as they have served us.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Appendix A. Nonprofit and State-Based Initiatives Supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service Serving Veterans and Military Families

American Red Cross Oregon Trail Chapter

Family Services of Butler Memorial Hospital

WA State Employment Security Department

United Way of Central West Virginia

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

Arizona Board of Regents OBO N. Arizona University

St. Bernard Project

American Red Cross Southern Arizona Chapter

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska

Waynesville RVI School District

AMVETS Career Center

Idaho Department of Labor

Great Basin Institute

Rhode Island School of Design Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources

CA Dept. Veterans Affairs

Goodwill Industries of the Southern Rivers, Inc.

Washington County Youth Service Bureau

Georgia Perimeter College

IHOM LifeCorp AmeriCorps

**Spartanburg County, SC School District
7**

Utah Conservation Corps

American Red Cross, St. Joseph County Chapter

Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids, Inc.

Ministry of Caring Inc.

Tennessee's Community Assistance Corp.

Affordable Housing and Homeless Alliance

Washington Campus Compact

Volunteers of America of Illinois

WestCare Foundation, Inc.

Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House

Rebuilding Together, Inc.

Virginia Department of Veterans Services

Habitat for Humanity International, Inc.

The Piney Woods School

WA State Department of Veterans Affairs

Utah Campus Compact

Public Allies, Inc.

Minnesota Council on Crime and Justice

**National Association for Public Interest
Law Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of
America**

New Sector Alliance, Inc.

**American Legion Auxiliary National
Headquarters**

- **American Red Cross National
Headquarters**
- **American Red Cross, South
Florida Region**
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of
America**
- **Blue Star Families**
- **Give an Hour**
- **Madison Street Veterans
Association**
- **Military Officers Association of
America**
- **National Military Family
Association**
- **Operation Homefront**
- **Ride 2 Recovery**
- **Senior Volunteer Services**
- **Still Serving Veterans**
- **Student Veterans of America**
- **TN Community Assistance
Corporation**
- **The Mission Continues**
- **Veterans Innovation Center**

American Red Cross of Greater NY

**Billings Metro VISTA Project, City of
Billings Brain Injury Association of Utah**

**CA Conservation Corps (CCC) Vet
Green Corps**

CareConnect RSVP

Central Iowa Shelter Services

City of Charleston

City of Houston

Communities In Action VISTA Project

Community Action Association of PA

Community Human Services Corporation

Community Renewal Team

Families in Transition

George Washington University

Georgia 4H Foundation

Habitat for Humanity International

**Hands on Volunteer Network of the
Valley**

HandsOn Greater Phoenix

Idaho National Guard

Legal Aid Society

**Maine Commission for Community
Service**

Maryland Campus Compact

Metropolitan Community College
Military Family Research Institute
Minnesota Campus Compact
Mission Solano Rescue Mission
Montana Legal Services Association
Municipality of Maunabo, Office of VA
National Alliance on Mental Illness - TN
**NC Association of Community
Development New Directions, Inc.**
New London Homeless Hospitality Center
North Dakota State University
**Ohio Campus Compact/University of
Akron**
Pathways PA
Prescott College
Prevention Resource Center
**Rural Advancement Foundation
International**
South Carolina Office of Rural Health
St. Stephen's Human Services
Tabor Community Services, Inc.

**The American Legion Auxiliary National
VISTA Community Anti-Drug Coalitions
of America**
**The Service Collaboration of Western NY
United Way of Central Kentucky**
United Way of the CSRA, Inc.
University of Arizona
**University of Arkansas Cooperative
Extension**
University of Wisconsin Extension 4-H
Utah National Guard
"Veterans Health Administration"
Volunteer WV - the WV Commission
Volunteers of America, Dakotas
**Washington County Youth Service
Bureau**
Waynesville Public Schools
**West Alabama Chapter of American Red
Cross**
**Yakima County - Department of Human
Services**
Adamsville Lion's Club
Alexian Brother Senior Neighbors
Alexian Brother Senior Neighbors
Alpert Jewish Community Center/

American Red Cross, Lowcountry Chapter

Agency on Aging-Bloomington RSVP

Area Agency on Aging: Region 1

City of Miles City (6 RSVP projects)

Athens-Limestone RSVP

Baltimore City

Baltimore County

Black Hills State University

Brooke County Senior Center

Bryan County RSVP

Butler County RSVP

Calcasieu Parish Police Jury RSVP

CareConnect RSVP

Cascade County, District IX HRDCCASE RSVP

CASE RSVP

Catholic Charities of Jackson, Michigan

Catholic Charities of Onondaga County

Catholic Charities of SW Ohio/Cincinnati RSVP

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Ogdensburg

Cattaraugus County Department of the Aging

Central Vermont Council on Aging

Centre County Commissioners

Cheyenne Housing Authority

City of Alamogordo

City of Albuquerque

City of Jacksonville

City of Kosciusko

City of Mitchell

City of Rapid City

City of Santa Fe RSVP

City of Waveland

Clarksville/Montgomery County CAC

Clinch Valley Community Action

Coahoma Opportunities, Inc.

Coastal Community Action Program

Coles Council County on Aging

Collier County

Columbia River Fire and Rescue

Coming of Age – Bay Area/RSVP of San Francisco and Alameda Counties

Community Service Society

Community Services Council

**Conejo Recreation and Park District
Connections, Inc.**

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Council of the Southern Mountains RSVP

County of Bucks - Area Agency on Aging

Covenant Medical Center

**Cumberland County Coordinating
Council on Older Adults**

Decorah Public Library

**Deming Luna County Commission on
Aging**

DOVE, Inc.

Durham Community Technical College

**Dutchess County Community Action
Partnership**

East Bay Community Action Program

**Erie County Department for Senior
Services**

Experience, Inc.

**Family and Community Christian
Association**

Family Services of Champaign County

Federal Hill House

**Four County Mental Health Center
RSVP**

**Friends of Suffolk Co. RSVP/ Suffolk
ESVP**

Garland County Council on Aging

Harford County RSVP

Highland Community College

Human Services Council

Hutchinson Community College RSVP

Iberia Council on Aging RSVP

INCA RSVP

Interfaith Older Adult Programs

Iowa Lakes Community College

Kauai County Agency on Elderly Affairs

**KI BOIS Community Action Foundation,
INC.**

**Klein and Stiffle Jewish Community
Centers**

Lake County CAP

Land-of-Sky Regional Council

Lawton RSVP

Lincoln/Kit Carson County RSVP

Lorain County Office on Aging	Philadelphia Corporation for Aging
Louisville-Jefferson Co Metro	Pima Council on Aging
Lower Eastern Shore RSVP	Positive Maturity, Inc.
Lowndes County Council on Aging, Inc.	Prime Plus, Norfolk Senior Center
Luzerne/Wyoming Counties' Bureau For Aging	Rocky Mountain Development Council, Area
McLennan County Community College –	VIA Agency on Aging, City of Miles City
Mesa County RSVP	RSVP in Oklahoma
Mid-Florida Community Services	RSVP in Pottawatomie County
Montgomery County	RSVP of Central OK, Inc.
Mountain States Group, Inc.	RSVP of Dane County, Inc.
New Castle County RSVP	RSVP of Kay County
New Hanover County	RSVP of Montgomery County
North Coast Opportunities	RSVP of the Flint Hills
North Dakota State University	RSVP of Volunteer Center of Los Angeles
North Iowa Area Community College	RSVP Tulsa
Northern Arizona University	Sacramento Cty. Dept. of Human Assistance
Olympic Community Action Program	Senior Action, Inc.
Osceola Co. Council on Aging	Senior Citizens Association
Paducah-McCracken County Senior Citizens	Senior Connections
Pennyrile Allied Community Services	Senior Friendship Centers

RSVP of the Central Coast

Sierra Joint Office on Aging

South Florida Community College

Southwestern IL College

SOWEGA Council on Aging

St. Mary County RSVP

**Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce -
Stuttgart- North Arkansas RSVP**

Sumter Senior Services

TN Opportunity Programs, Inc.

Triton College

United Way of Martin County

Upper East TN HAD

Utah National Guard

Venango County Commissioners

Village of Ruidoso

Volunteer Macon

**Volunteers of America - Northern
Colorado Volunteers of America of New
Orleans RSVP**

Volunteers of America of Minnesota

Volunteers of America RSVP Program

Volunteers of America, Dakotas

Wayne County Action Program Inc.

Western IL AAA

**Yadkin Economic Development District,
Inc.**

Yellowstone County Council on Aging,

York County Council on Aging

YWCA of McLean County

Appendix B. VISTA Member Exit Survey: September 2011-November 2012

VISTA members are an integral component of the anti-poverty mission of the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Not only do members support VISTA projects in carrying out programs to overcome poverty, they also help organizations that sponsor VISTA projects build capacity and support services and maintain grounded connections with the communities they serve.

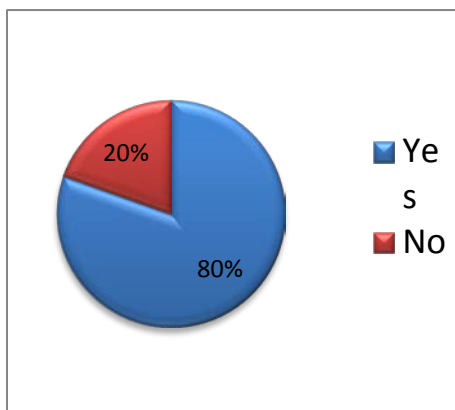
In an effort to empower and validate the contributions of our VISTAs, we ask them to fill in the Member Satisfaction Survey when they complete their service. The survey is an important tool for us to gain an understanding of the satisfaction with the VISTA program and to identify the training and support needs of the active VISTA member.

The survey is also an important tool for us to measure how best we can support VISTAs who are veterans of the U.S military. The results of the Member Satisfaction Survey are overwhelmingly positive among VISTAs who are veterans.

- Nearly 78% of members who are veterans rate their overall experience of serving with AmeriCorps VISTA as 'extremely satisfied' or 'satisfied'.
- 80% of members who are veterans state that participation in national service helped them reconnect with community activities in civilian life.

Survey Question: Has your participation in national service helped you reconnect with community activities in civilian life?

Responses by VISTA Who Are Veterans



Comments by AmeriCorps VISTA Members Who are Veterans

I was very shy, and I had low self-esteem issues. AmeriCorps VISTA service taught me that I can do whatever I put my mind to. It exposed me to new avenues in life I would have never thought I could travel.

Veteran in Cleveland, OH

Being an AmeriCorps VISTA fulfills the desire I've had for years to become a servant in the Army, Marine, or Navy. I was rejected years ago because of my diabetes. It is a true honor to be a part of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Veteran in Columbus, OH

My AmeriCorps VISTA experience was defining. Before joining VISTA, I had no confidence at all. I had been on disability for 15 years, and I had tried to find work, but alas no results. I really thought I would never find anything. Couple that with the fact that I never really thought I had accomplished anything in my life, and AmeriCorps service was really defining for me.

Veteran in Vancouver, WA

The experience of working with the youth of the community has helped me make the decision to pursue a new job working with the youth.

Veteran in Caldwell, ID

My AmeriCorps service helped me to realize that I can make a difference to those who are less fortunate and living in low income communities. Therefore, I decided while doing my service that I would go back to school. I am now getting my Master's degree in Public Administration.

Veteran in Montgomery, AL

It helped me determine that I want a career in the nonprofit sector.

Veteran in Tuscaloosa, AL

It has helped me define myself as a person and my beliefs.

Veteran in Washington, DC

My year of AmeriCorps service changed my life and helped me to realize that I belong in public service.

Veteran in Ashland, KY

My experience with AmeriCorps confirmed to me that my choice to become a social worker was the right choice. Helping homeless veterans helped me understand that this is exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life. I will always be grateful for this experience because of that. This experience will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Veteran in Washington, DC

I realized that I have the capacity, willingness, ability, and skills to pursue my graduate program and be a psychologist and work in low-income communities, particularly with minority groups.

Veteran in Emmitsburg, MD

It has confirmed my belief in continuing to help my fellow man/woman in any way that I can. Also, it has reaffirmed my deep belief in God, that we are all his creation, and that we all should be concerned about the welfare of others.

Veteran in Wyandotte, MI

I learned that ... if you continue to make one small difference at a time, you eventually make a big difference. This was a very important lesson that I took away from my service experience.

Veteran in Beckley, WV

Experiencing diversity whether it was race, culture, or economic status, taught me to always remember that people come from different situations and to never be judgmental toward someone.

Veteran in Madison, WI

I never knew how much children depended on people other than their parents until I worked in an alternative school. I saw how the feeling of "no one cares" affects children. It is something that will stay with me forever. It made the decision for me to become an educator.

Veteran in Hampton, VA

After my service as a VISTA volunteer, I thought I could return to my career as a computer programmer and put volunteering out of my mind. I did return to programming, but I ending up leaving the field again to obtain a Master of Divinity. I'm now a community-based Chaplain!

Veteran in Kissimmee, FL

When I came into VISTA, I was in a dark place after my military service, trying to find my place and reintegrate into my community. VISTA helped me do just that. Now I am moving into employment, my next step as a disabled veteran and Wounded Warrior. I am so very thankful to VISTA and United Way for their patience and help. I am forever grateful for this experience.

Veteran in Augusta, GA

My VISTA experience was making myself a better person, being a part of a compassionate community, and doing something important in my life.

Veteran in Baton Rouge, LA

As a veteran, I would like to continue ... to help others in these and future times. I feel AmeriCorps VISTA is the perfect opportunity to do so.

Veteran in Columbus, OH

I have not had a full-time job in almost 20 years. My AmeriCorps service helped show me that I was capable, employable. It showed me that if I focus on an issue and I receive the proper training, experience, and positive feedback, then there is nothing I can't do. I have been honored to serve my community... and those in need connect to agencies and organizations that are there to provide services.

Veteran in Washington, DC

It gave me an idea of what I like, what I need from a work environment, and the balance that I must have in my life in order to function at my best on the job, especially, as a veteran with PTSD.

Veteran in Atlanta, GA