

**Serve Colorado -
The Governor's Commission on Community Service**

Office of Lieutenant Governor Joseph A. Garcia



2016-2018

COLORADO
STATE SERVICE PLAN

Introduction

[Serve Colorado - The Governor's Commission on Community Service](#), under the Office of Lieutenant Governor Joseph A. Garcia, presents the *2016-2018 Colorado State Service Plan* to the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS). This plan builds upon the momentum from the *2013-2015 Colorado State Service Plan* to establish goals that promote national service and volunteerism as sustainable solutions to Colorado's growing and diverse needs.

In 2013 Serve Colorado implemented a State Service Plan establishing efficient, effective, and elegant strategic goals that guided the Commission's work through 2015. The plan outlined the priorities of strengthening cross-sector support to increase strategic partnerships and sustainability, increasing public awareness and engagement in national service, and expanding the state portfolio to effectively impact regionally identified priority areas.

Serve Colorado strives to build a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in Colorado. Furthermore, it promotes volunteerism and service as a means to strengthen Colorado communities through Days of Service, special initiatives, and community partnerships. It functions under the leadership of sixteen Commissioners, representing a variety of sectors, to distribute and administer Colorado's allocation of [AmeriCorps State](#) funding.

This service plan aligns with the CNCS [Strategic Plan 2011-2015](#), the [2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act](#), initiatives of [Lieutenant Governor Joseph A. Garcia](#), and the local priorities identified by the statewide needs assessment conducted during the spring of 2015.

The Serve America Act directs CNCS to expand opportunities to serve, build the capacity of individuals, nonprofits and communities, and encourage innovative approaches to addressing community challenges. The law puts a strong emphasis on focusing national service on a core set of priority issue areas, defined below, and measuring the impact of service.

- [Disaster Services](#): Build the capacity of national service network organizations to help their states and localities prepare for, respond to, recover from and mitigate disasters and increase community resiliency
- [Economic Opportunity](#): Provide, support, and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people
- [Education](#): Provide, support, and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged people, especially children

- [Environmental Stewardship](#): Provide direct services that contribute to increased energy and water efficiency, renewable energy use, or improving at-risk ecosystems; support increased citizen behavioral change leading to increased efficiency, renewable energy use, and ecosystem improvements, particularly for economically disadvantaged households and economically disadvantaged communities
- [Healthy Futures](#): Provide direct services that enable adults age 55 and over to remain in their own homes with the same or improved quality of life for as long as possible; increase physical activity and improve nutrition in youth with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity, and improve access to primary and preventive health care.
- [Veterans and Military Families](#): Demonstrate the potential for CNCS-supported national service interventions to 1) positively impact the quality of life of veterans and 2) improve military family strength

At the time of writing, Serve Colorado funds thirteen (13) programs that support 1,100 AmeriCorps positions and four planning grants to develop effective, evidence-based programs in the future. Current members serve throughout the state to tutor and mentor students; provide safe, secure housing and nutrition to low income households; develop and implement after school Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs; re-engage students who are at-risk of dropping out of school; prevent wildfires; and maintain public lands and waterways.

Using these components as the momentum to continue onward, Serve Colorado has determined three priority areas for the next three years. Through a comprehensive statewide need assessment, conducted in the spring of 2015, communities across Colorado have identified Education, Economic Opportunity, and Healthy Futures as their highest priority areas. Serve Colorado's goal to address these community identified priority areas will guide funding decisions, program development activities, strategic, long-range strategies in Colorado, and compliment existing national service programs through the year 2018.

Colorado's Education Landscape

Nearly one in four high school students in Colorado will not graduate on time, and on average over 10,500 students will drop out each year¹. Colorado's education system frequently scores low when compared to other states. Nationwide, Colorado ranks 43rd in per-pupil spending² and 38th in spending on education³ when adjusted for regional cost differences.

¹ *Annual Dropout Rate by District - 2013-14 School Year*. "Dropout Statistics." Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education.

² Ed Week, 2015 Quality Counts, 2012 data

³ Ed Week, 2015 Quality Counts, 2012 data

The challenges inherent in the aforesaid statistics are several and quite complicated. Colorado is currently investing significantly in early childhood education because of the fact that research has shown time and again that reaching children during their formative years is absolutely critical for their lifelong biological and emotional development.

In 2013, Serve Colorado and its Commissioners made a strategic decision that investing in AmeriCorps programs that have a positive impact on Colorado High School graduation rates was a worthwhile opportunity. To that end, Serve Colorado in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Human Services has spent a good deal of time developing programs that have an evidence-based approach to supporting Colorado children and families. While there is a long way to go, there is a solid foundation for this work and an increased demand for interventions utilizing AmeriCorps members as a solution to the complex challenges facing schools and communities.

The following section details the national service resources available in the state of Colorado.

Colorado National Service Landscape

Each year more than 10,000 individuals of all ages and backgrounds participate in national service and volunteer opportunities in Colorado. Participants provide additional support to youth, veterans, disaster victims, and other economically disadvantaged populations in more than 770 locations throughout the state. During the 2014-2015 program year alone, CNCS invested almost \$32 million in Colorado through national service initiatives. This investment leveraged an additional \$12,970,000 to build local support to serve local communities.

The State of Colorado is uniquely positioned in its ability to serve local communities due to its presence of national service programs, including AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC, Senior Corps, and the Social Innovation Fund. The following describes its national service resources during the 2014-2015 program year. More information can be found by clicking each hyperlink.

- Serve Colorado administers thirteen [AmeriCorps State](#) programs, with 760 members, addressing various community challenges. Programs directly impact early literacy and education, job skill development, homelessness, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and environmental stewardship.
- Colorado benefits from [AmeriCorps National Direct](#) members who serve in regional locations of national organizations, including nonprofits, municipalities, schools, colleges, and churches. Currently, Colorado has more than 1,354 AmeriCorps National Direct members impacting communities through education, health, and leadership initiatives.

- Colorado further benefits from 160 [AmeriCorps VISTA](#) members. AmeriCorps VISTA members commit to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency to alleviate poverty and build capacity of host organizations, while improving literacy, health services, economic development, and serving low-income communities.
- Colorado hosts the [AmeriCorps NCCC](#) Southwest Regional Campus in Denver with more than 320 members. AmeriCorps* NCCC members have completed 64 team-based national and community service projects by partnering with nonprofits, local municipalities, state governments, and the federal government in Colorado alone.
- Colorado engages 7,833 [Senior Corps](#) members to help meet the needs and challenges of its communities. Senior Corps connects adults age 55 and over with opportunities to become mentors, companions to people experiencing need, and to contribute their professional expertise to community projects.
- The Colorado [Social Innovation Fund](#) partners with Mile High United Way to support eight nonprofit organizations working to improve the lives of people in low-income communities. By contributing over \$1.65 million, the Social Innovation Fund leverages public and private resources to grow innovative solutions that impact economic opportunity, healthy futures and youth development.

Coloradans further demonstrate their commitment to volunteerism through statewide Days of Service. Serve Colorado coordinates four annual days of service, including the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January, César Chávez Month of Service in April, Colorado Cares Day in July, and Colorado United Day in September to observe the September 11th day of remembrance.

Through volunteerism and national service, Coloradans continue to create innovations to address their communities' most pressing challenges. By serving together, Coloradans have made a significant impact in addressing the challenges facing education and literacy, health, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship throughout the state, and will continue to do so as a result of future collaborative national service presence.

Approach to Outreach

During the spring of 2015, Serve Colorado conducted a statewide needs assessment through an online survey to gain the public input of stakeholder groups and citizens in each of Colorado's sixty-four diverse counties. Respondents from each county represented state, county, and local governments, nonprofits, the private sector, educational institutions, health and wellness organizations, environmental stakeholder groups, and community members at-large. Serve Colorado partnered with current subgrantees throughout the state, the Colorado CNCS state office, the Southwest AmeriCorps NCCC Regional Campus, the Community Resource Center,

county commissioners, natural disaster response agencies, and regional councils of governments, among others, to disseminate the survey and ensure diverse stakeholder groups were represented. The information learned from the assessment will be utilized to support regionally identified needs through its grant making opportunities.

The survey assessed the capacity in which national service can meet the growing needs of each community with viable, sustainable solutions. Survey respondents identified **Education, Economic Opportunity, and Healthy Futures**, correspondingly, as the top three priorities for communities throughout the state, although specificity within each focus area varies from region to region. Serve Colorado pledges to play its part in improving the educational landscape of the state and to support AmeriCorps programs that increase the state's high school graduation rates in the ways that make the most sense for communities throughout Colorado. However, it is important to note that each focus area, as explained in the introduction of this plan, holds significance throughout Colorado and will not be absent from the national service landscape in the years to come.

In addition to the needs assessment, Serve Colorado gained important feedback through its involvement in [Rural Philanthropy Days](#) (RPD) [listening tours](#). These sessions aim to engage funders, government officials, community leaders, and nonprofit individuals in collectively identifying and addressing regional community needs. RPD is a statewide program promoting excellence in Colorado's rural communities by providing nonprofit leaders access to resources they need to make an impact. Based upon pre-existing geographical partnerships, it strategically divides Colorado's 52 rural counties into eight rural regions. Each of the eight regions have differing characteristics, identities, and needs that separate them from one another, making the experience of working with each one truly unique.

Three in Three

Serve Colorado will continue the momentum of the goals established in the *2013-2015 Colorado State Service Plan* to further the following three priorities through the year 2018. It will utilize its special initiatives and grant making processes to complete each priority and has identified potential strategies to do so, which are listed below. This section discusses Serve Colorado's opportunities to build a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility throughout the state while enhancing the impact of its national service resources.

- 1. Strengthen cross-sector support to increase strategic partnerships and sustainability.** Serve Colorado will support programming and subgrantees that foster collaboration with other AmeriCorps streams of service, nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, and the private sector to increase effectiveness and ensure financial and programmatic sustainability.

Potential Strategies

- Coordinate education-related service programs to impact Colorado’s high school graduation rates, including the NCCC education team and Serve Colorado’s current AmeriCorps State programs;
- Partner with private and public sector organizations, including Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC), to coordinate early literacy initiatives and service days;
- Include weighted requirements in each Request for Proposals relating to subgrantees’ financial capacity and programmatic sustainability to be reviewed during the AmeriCorps State grant application review process;
- Develop partnerships with other State Commissions through collaborative opportunities to replicate and expand successful, grassroots, evidence-based AmeriCorps programs in Colorado communities;
- Collaborate with high capacity organizations that have a regional or statewide presence including, but not limited to the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs and Colorado 4-H with the Colorado State University Extension;
- Provide training and technical assistance to subgrantees on diversifying funding to support successful AmeriCorps programs;
- Support the Colorado Recovery Office by providing AmeriCorps members, community volunteers, and other resources as needed in times of spontaneous natural disaster.

2. Increase understanding and engagement in national service and volunteerism.

Serve Colorado recognizes the importance of spreading awareness of the impact that service and volunteerism has in Colorado, as well as increasing the engagement of Coloradans in service to their communities in order to support the health and vitality of the state’s future.

Potential Strategies

- Utilize One Book for Colorado, Read Across America Day, and other early literacy initiatives to promote the impact of service programs on Colorado’s education landscape;
- Leverage local leadership programs or university programs to develop a Commission-focused communication strategy;
- Continue to participate in Rural Philanthropy Days to communicate opportunities and capacity building resources like AmeriCorps State and the Lt. Governor’s Early Literacy Initiative programs with regions throughout rural Colorado;
- Continue to enforce the policy that all AmeriCorps members must wear the branded AmeriCorps Colorado logo daily via compliance site monitoring, training, and discounted AmeriCorps gear when possible to be ordered on a statewide basis;

- Assist programs staff to more effectively communicate and publicize their data-driven program impact with annual “Impact Snapshots” trainings;
- Promote statewide Days of Service to demonstrate statewide collaboration, as well as foster regional volunteer participation to support the health of Colorado communities;
- Utilize social media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google Groups, to increase awareness of service presence and opportunities to all Coloradans.

3. **Expand the state portfolio to effectively impact regionally-identified priorities.**

Serve Colorado will invest its national service resources in evidence-based solutions to regionally-determined priorities.

Potential Strategies

- Continue to target 75% of Formula funding to support AmeriCorps State programs that increase Colorado’s high school graduation rate;
- Continue to prioritize national service resources in Colorado’s rural and under-represented communities to leverage federal resources and expand program impact as outlined in its Request for Proposals (RFP);
- Utilize the map of regional priorities as informed by the State Service Plan survey to understand regionally-identified priorities, compliment existing programs, and support program expansion;
- Expand high-quality and cost effective technical assistance to potential applicants that build capacity, expand knowledge of national service, and encourage evidence-based solutions to community priorities;
- Refine training to current subgrantees to strengthen performance measurement and evaluation of impact;
- Direct funding towards programs that utilize evidence-based interventions to address regional priorities.

Conclusion

With support of the Serve America Act, the CNCS *Strategic Plan 2011-2015*, and initiatives of Governor Hickenlooper and Lieutenant Governor Garcia, Serve Colorado pledges to leverage its AmeriCorps State and Early Literacy Initiative programs to serve Colorado communities as determined on local and regional levels. By providing training, conducting thorough outreach, and utilizing effective grant making processes, it will capitalize on the immense resource that is national service and build the capacity of organizations to affect the change prioritized in their communities. With the continued development of collaborative partnerships, such as those with AmeriCorps NCCC and AmeriCorps VISTA, the expansion of a more geographically diverse portfolio, and increased understanding of and engagement in national service, Serve Colorado will ensure that service remains a sustainable solution to a healthy, vital tomorrow.