



Applicant Manual

2026-2027



A Note from the National Service Team

Thank you for submitting an application to serve with AmeriCorps!

At [Housing Action Illinois](#), we believe housing is a human right and a human need. We want our communities to thrive, and that starts with everyone having a safe, stable place to call home. Our statewide coalition, which currently unites 190+ organizations, has been dedicated to expanding and protecting the availability of quality, affordable housing in Illinois for more than 35 years.

We are facing a nationwide housing crisis. Local organizations are trying to meet growing needs with limited staff and resources, while new voices are struggling to break into the housing and community development field. Our AmeriCorps Network addresses these challenges by helping organizations tackle new projects while providing professional development for emerging housing leaders.

Since 2010, [Housing Action Corps](#) has connected hundreds of AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program with community organizations across Illinois (and beyond). All Housing Action Corps staff and VISTA leaders are AmeriCorps alumni, so we recognize the dedication that national service takes, as well as the transformation it has on organizations, communities, and AmeriCorps members themselves. We hope you join us!

This packet provides information about Housing Action Illinois and the AmeriCorps VISTA program. It outlines available benefits and what to expect during the interview process. If you are offered an AmeriCorps position, we will share additional materials and resources ahead of your term of service. Do not hesitate to reach out with questions or feedback by contacting a member of our team individually or AmeriCorps@housingactionil.org!

Housing Action Illinois – National Service Team

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Overview of Interview Process

If you are receiving this manual, we have received your application to serve in Housing Action Corps with one of our host organizations. Below is an outline of what to expect during the application and interview process. In order to be considered for an interview, you will need to complete and return the applicant questionnaire sent via email.

Key Steps of Interview Process:

1. Housing Action completes a standard screening process of your application and questionnaire. Based on these results, Housing Action recommends you as a candidate to one or more host organizations, or provides feedback on how to strengthen your application for service in the future.
2. If you have questions about AmeriCorps service, you are encouraged to schedule a phone or video call with Housing Action; this can happen at any time during the interview process (*see contact information on pg. 2*).
3. The organization hosting the AmeriCorps position schedules and conducts an interview; they will share information about the organization and role, as well as ask you questions about your skills and experiences.
4. If the organization decides to offer you a position, Housing Action will review your references, send you an offer letter, and guide you through the process of accepting an AmeriCorps position and completing pre-service steps.
5. If the organization does not offer you a position, Housing Action may invite you to interview for another position in our network or encourage you to apply again for the following service year.

Resources & Quick Links

Housing Action Illinois

- [Housing Action Corps](#)
- Keep in touch: [Newsletter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Bluesky](#)

AmeriCorps

- [My AmeriCorps Portal](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Program](#)
- AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook - [English](#) & [Spanish](#)



Overview of Housing Action Illinois & AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://www.americorps.gov).

AmeriCorps VISTA is an AmeriCorps program that connects AmeriCorps members to community organizations to fight poverty. Through fundraising, volunteer recruitment, program development, and more, members gain skills that put them on track for a life of service in the public, private, or nonprofit sector.

Housing Action Illinois is a statewide coalition that leads the movement to expand and protect affordable housing and end homelessness in Illinois. We bring together more than 200 member organizations—including housing counseling agencies, homeless services providers, housing developers, and policymakers—to work toward a state where everyone has a good, stable home. We create access and housing opportunities for communities throughout Illinois by advocating for better policies, raising awareness, training member organizations, and spearheading statewide collaboration.

Housing Action Corps is an AmeriCorps grantee that places AmeriCorps VISTA members with community-based organizations in Illinois and housing counseling agencies nationwide. Housing Action Corps members dedicate a year of full-time service to projects that build organizational capacity, advance housing opportunities, and strengthen communities. Housing Action Illinois specializes in AmeriCorps program administration, recruitment, reporting, and training, so Housing Action Corps host sites and AmeriCorps members can focus on making an impact in their communities. By coordinating skill building and networking opportunities for Housing Action Corps members, we promote leadership, professional development, and collaboration in the housing field.

Housing Counseling Corps is an initiative of Housing Action Corps that aims to build the capacity of housing counseling programs and establish a path for AmeriCorps members to become HUD-Certified housing counselors. Launched in 2021, Housing Counseling Corps members spend their service learning about the housing counseling profession, becoming familiar with the specific programs and needs of a housing counseling agency, and preparing for the HUD Housing Counseling Certification Exam. Housing Counseling Corps members serve with housing counseling agencies in Illinois and throughout the United States.



AmeriCorps Member Benefits

AmeriCorps members are eligible to receive benefits provided by the AmeriCorps VISTA program and Housing Action Corps.

AmeriCorps VISTA Benefits

Refer to the [AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook](#) for more details about benefits.

Living Allowance

AmeriCorps members serving in the VISTA program receive a living allowance that is based on poverty rates for a single individual in the geographic area where they serve. The allowance is paid biweekly to members through direct deposit and should help cover basic necessities (such as housing, food, and utilities).

2026-2027 Living Allowance Rate (\$68.39 per day, 7 days per week):

- AmeriCorps members receive **\$24,962 per year**
- Members receive their stipend bi-weekly via direct deposit; this means you will receive \$957.46 every two weeks

End of Service Award

At the end of their service, AmeriCorps members receive their choice of a [Segal AmeriCorps Education Award](#) or an end of service cash stipend. The education award is a voucher that members can use to pay for future education and technical training, or to repay existing eligible federal student loans. The cash stipend is paid to the member in their last two living allowance payments and there are no stipulations for its use.

Choice of One:

- Segal AmeriCorps Education Award: **\$7,395**
- End of Service Cash Stipend (accrues \$4.94 per day): **\$1,803**

Leave

AmeriCorps members receive 10 personal days and 10 medical leave days during their service. Additional leave days can be granted in certain situations, but must be approved by the AmeriCorps Midwest Regional Office.

Up to 5 leave days may be granted in the case of an emergency, such as a natural disaster or a critical illness/death of an immediate family member. Up to 5 leave days may be granted in the case of medical situations that require extended recuperation. Up to 10 leave days may be granted for parental leave. Leave days will also be granted if a member is assigned to required military service or jury duty.



Healthcare Benefits

AmeriCorps members who already have health insurance are eligible to enroll in the AmeriCorps VISTA Healthcare Allowance to reimburse out-of-pocket healthcare expenses. Members who do not have health coverage or are ineligible for insurance plans at the start of their service are eligible to enroll in the AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefit Plan, which is available at no cost. AmeriCorps members also are offered a special enrollment period for purchasing insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace, which is 60 days from a member's start and end date. Learn more: [AmeriCorps VISTA Health Benefits](#).

Childcare Benefits

AmeriCorps members caring for children under the age of 13 may qualify for the [AmeriCorps Childcare Benefit Program](#), which covers all or part of the member's childcare costs from qualified childcare providers during their service.

Relocation Assistance

If an AmeriCorps member relocates more than 50 miles for their service, they are eligible for two forms of [Relocation Benefits](#): Relocation Travel Allowance (based on mileage) and Settling-In Allowance (\$750). Members who return to their previous home of record at the end of service are also eligible to receive a Close of Service Travel Allowance.

Loan Forbearance and Deferment

AmeriCorps members with federal student loans may be eligible to put them into forbearance or deferment during their service year. AmeriCorps service also counts towards the [Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program \(PSLF\)](#). If you place your loans in forbearance for the service period, complete your term of service, and receive a Segal Education Award, you may be eligible to have the National Service Trust pay all or a portion of the interest that accumulated on your student loan(s) during your term of service. These payments are made in addition to and are not deducted from your Education Award balance.

Non-Competitive Eligibility Status

Full-year AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program receive one year of non-competitive eligibility for employment in the federal government. This special hiring status enables members to apply for federal jobs without going through the standard public competitive selection process. Members can search for positions and learn more on [USAJOBS](#).



Housing Action Corps Benefits

AmeriCorps members are eligible to receive additional benefits and opportunities as part of Housing Action Corps.

Public Transportation Reimbursement

If an AmeriCorps member is serving in the Chicago Metro Area and uses public transportation to commute to and from their host site, they are eligible for an unlimited public transit pass. Host sites can also offer transportation reimbursements or stipends as supplemental benefits for their AmeriCorps members.

In-Service Trainings

In addition to the training offered by AmeriCorps, Housing Action coordinates two mandatory, multi-day In-Service Trainings (IST) for members in our network. The Fall IST helps set AmeriCorps members up for success during their term of service, while the Spring IST prepares members for securing their next professional endeavor after their service ends.

Professional Development & Networking

Housing Action Corps members build relationships and access resources among their cohort of AmeriCorps members and within Housing Action's vast coalition of member organizations. Registration fees are waived for AmeriCorps members and alumni who want to attend Housing Action's annual Housing Matters Conference and Toast to Housing Justice Benefit. Housing Counseling Corps members have access to free housing counseling training and curriculum to prepare them for the HUD Housing Counseling Certification Exam. Additional training may be available for free or at a discounted rate for all Housing Action Corps members, as requested.

Chicago Furniture Bank Partnership

AmeriCorps members in Chicago can use the services of the [Chicago Furniture Bank](#) to receive low-cost furnishings (bed, desk, couch, tables, lamps, etc.) during their move.

Employment Opportunities

In 2021, we surveyed AmeriCorps members who served in our network from 2010-2020 and compiled a report, [National Service With Housing Action](#). Nearly 94% of Housing Action respondents reported they secured their next step within 6 months of finishing their term, compared to the national AmeriCorps average of 67%. Below are a few ways we support members in our network in gaining employment after their service:

- *Fair Housing* - AmeriCorps members in our network are eligible to receive free training to become a fair housing tester during or after their service, which is a



paid opportunity that supports fact-finding on discriminatory landlords and real estate management companies.

- *Housing Counseling* - Housing Counseling Corps members are eligible to receive free training during their service to develop a career as a housing counselor. Housing Action regularly offers the [Housing Counseling Career Path](#) in English and Spanish, which outlines the core principles of housing counseling and prepares participants to pass the HUD Individual Certification Exam, making them eligible for hire by a HUD-approved housing counseling agency after their service ends. Housing Action Corps members not in the Housing Counseling Corps may also be eligible for free or discounted housing counseling training, pending availability.
- *Housing Action Coalition* - In the last few months of service, Housing Action will collect and share employment opportunities from our coalition member organizations and partners throughout the state. We are also able to set up informational interviews between organizations and members as requested. Housing Counseling Corps members will also have access to a national network of housing counseling agencies and tailored professional development opportunities.

Supplemental Benefits

Many of the host organizations in Housing Action Corps offer supplemental benefits and services to their AmeriCorps members, such as helping locate housing in the community, covering transportation costs, or providing a monthly housing or grocery stipend. If you are unsure if the position you applied to offers supplemental benefits, please reach out to AmeriCorps@housingactionil.org.



Crucial AmeriCorps Policies

Refer to the [AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook](#) for a full description of policies.

Teleservice & Commutable Distance

As of January 1, 2023, AmeriCorps does not allow remote service for AmeriCorps VISTA members, which AmeriCorps defines as members serving a community while not living in that community. All AmeriCorps members must reside within a commuting distance of the geographic community of their assigned host site, which AmeriCorps defines as within a two hour commute from the hosting organization's office. Partial and full teleservice (work-from-home) will still be permitted, as long as the member is located within the commuting area throughout their service and able to be physically present at the host site when required. For more information, refer to the [AmeriCorps VISTA Teleservice & Virtual Service Site Policy Update FY2023](#).

Outside Education

AmeriCorps members may participate in online or in-person classes, regardless of subject matter, during their service year. Coursework and class scheduling must not interfere with the operations of the project or their responsibilities, and must be pre-approved by the host site and Housing Action. Applicants who are currently enrolled in classes should discuss their study plan during the interview to ensure that their courses will not interfere with the responsibilities of the AmeriCorps project.

Outside Employment

AmeriCorps members are expected to honor their commitment to serve on a full-time basis for their term of service, but they may participate in outside part-time employment, paid work study, fellowships, or internship programs as long as the position does not interfere with the service hours they have been assigned or impact their ability to effectively perform their responsibilities as an AmeriCorps member. It is also not permitted for an AmeriCorps member to take a part-time position at their host site during their term of service. All outside employment must be pre-approved by the host site and Housing Action.