



ServeOhio 2020-21

AmeriCorps Communications Guide



SERVE **OHIO**



Introduction

Sharing your story through public and media relations allows for a positive relationship with your community and helps garner and build support for your program. You can tell your meaningful story better than anybody else. These stories stimulate emotions, help us remember, influence our decisions and link to our sense of generosity. Taking the time to communicate helps attract resources for your program, including volunteers, sponsors and funders.

Public relations simply means developing and managing a deliberate and strategic approach to publicizing your message. When telling your story, follow this simple process to ensure you meet all key points: know your audience, define your core messages, create connection, establish a call-to-action, choose your medium, share your story and measure the impact.

Sub-grantees are responsible for ensuring that the proper ServeOhio acknowledgement occurs. This is where ServeOhio asks for consistency in core messaging so that our strong partnership continues. ServeOhio funds and administers state AmeriCorps programs, where terms and conditions require proper communication to illustrate our important relationship. This guide will serve as your resource for media relations, event planning and signage as outlined in provision 1.3, 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 of the Ohio AmeriCorps Supplementary Terms and Conditions. If you have specific questions that are not addressed in this guide, please contact the Outreach & Education Officer at ServeOhio.

About ServeOhio

ServeOhio empowers communities to utilize AmeriCorps members and volunteers to address the frontline issues in education, health, economic opportunity and environmental stewardship. As Ohio's Commission on Service and Volunteerism, we collaborate and partner with nonprofit, government and community organizations to increase the effective utilization of AmeriCorps members and community volunteers. We develop, fund and evaluate AmeriCorps programming throughout the state for the purpose of building a stronger Ohio.

*Mission: Strengthening Ohio
Communities through AmeriCorps
and Volunteer Engagement.*

The Ohio Legislature established ServeOhio in 1994, under the original name of The Governor's Community Service Commission. ServeOhio operates under authority pursuant to Section 121.40 of the Ohio Revised Code and is purposed specifically to administer grants in Ohio under the federal National & Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Today, the largest of these grants is the AmeriCorps program, where Ohio currently has 26 partner organizations and 900 AmeriCorps members serving throughout the state. The broad mission remains the same – to strengthen Ohio communities through AmeriCorps and volunteer engagement.

ServeOhio is funded by the Ohio General Assembly and the Corporation for National and Community Service, and leverages federal, state and private dollars to operate and fund AmeriCorps state programs.

In addition to administering AmeriCorps programs, ServeOhio partners with volunteer administrators, mobilizers and non-profits to promote volunteerism throughout Ohio. In 2020, these programs will engage nearly 11,000 volunteers, contributing roughly 53,000 hours of service.

ServeOhio AmeriCorps Portfolio

The 2020-21 AmeriCorps Portfolio includes 26 programs which support more than 900 members. For a copy of the 2020-21 program directory visit www.serveohio.org/AmeriCorps/Ohio-AmeriCorps-Programs.

Staff

ServeOhio staff provides service leadership, AmeriCorps programmatic assistance, communication support and professional development. As of June 2020, there are seven full-time staff members at ServeOhio. For a full staff directory, visit www.serveohio.org/About/Staff.

Commissioners

Commissioners play an important role in developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to encourage and expand community service programs throughout the state. Currently, there are 16 Commissioners. Chris Staffer is Chair of the Commission. For a Commissioner directory, visit <https://www.serveohio.org/About/Commissioners>.

Ohio AmeriCorps Supplementary Terms & Conditions: Program Year 2020-21

ServeOhio includes media guidance in the Ohio AmeriCorps Supplementary Terms & Conditions to highlight the AmeriCorps commitment to local, state and national partnerships:

- 1.3 Sub-grantee must credit ServeOhio for its support and use the name “ServeOhio, Ohio’s commission on service and volunteerism,” and/or current logo on communications, publications, marketing, and media materials as outlined in the ServeOhio Communication Guidelines. Detailed instructions and training are found on the ServeOhio website.
 - 1.3.1 Acknowledgement of Support: Publications created by members or grant-funded staff must be consistent with the purposes of the grant and must include the AmeriCorps logo and ServeOhio logo. The Sub-grantee is responsible for assuring that CNCS and ServeOhio acknowledgment appears in any external report or publication of material based upon work supported by this grant. Acknowledgement also must meet federal requirements under CNCS AmeriCorps Grant Terms and Conditions III.B.
 - 1.3.2 To satisfy the requirements of CNCS General Terms and Conditions III.M., when announcing the initial grant award, include the grant amount, the percentage that represents of the total grant, and the amount of non-governmental funds from the match source.

Acknowledging ServeOhio

Sub-grantees must acknowledge “ServeOhio, Ohio’s commission on service and volunteerism” in all AmeriCorps communication, marketing and media materials, including, but not limited to, publications, press releases, newsletters, emails, websites and marketing materials. Use “ServeOhio” in all mentions after the official title. Continue to use “CNCS” when referencing the Corporation for National and Community Service.

All sub-grantee websites must post both the AmeriCorps AND ServeOhio logos.

Compliance

Sub-grantees are responsible for assuring that AmeriCorps publications acknowledge ServeOhio. During site visits with a ServeOhio program officer, sub-grantees must show examples of proper ServeOhio logo use, printed acknowledgement and marketing materials. Sub-grantees shall fully demonstrate to their program officer that their organization is part of a statewide service effort by using the ServeOhio logo and title, where applicable.

Should an inaccuracy occur, such as a reporter’s error or an incorrect use of the ServeOhio name, the program officer will also take into consideration the program’s swift corrective action.

Host Sites

Program directors are responsible for ensuring that the host site staff are trained with ServeOhio terms and conditions (1.3, 1.3.1 and 1.3.2), media communication requirements and public relations associated with the organization’s AmeriCorps program. Host sites must show examples of proper ServeOhio logo use, printed acknowledgement and marketing materials.

Tip: Keep a list of “validators” who can speak easily and enthusiastically about your program! Designate them as a potential spokesperson and call them for a quick quote.

Hosting a Public Event

ServeOhio strongly encourages sub-grantees to identify and invite ServeOhio Commissioners and staff, local elected officials, local media, business partners and community partners to ensure an active event that shows the strength of the statewide partnership. Sub-grantees should designate one or two spokespersons at each event that are familiar with core messaging, communication and the elevator speech.

These items should be included at or take place at public events:

- AmeriCorps logos, signage and clothing (*required*)
- Introduction of stakeholders
- Testimonials
- Presentation
- Information packet with statistics
- Photo opportunities
- Action and visuals
- “AmeriCorps Member for a Day”
- Sponsor logos on printed materials

We strongly encourage you to include these items on your PR checklist:

- ✓ Resources and logos
- ✓ Contact lists
 - ServeOhio Commissioners and staff
 - County contacts
 - Business contacts
 - Legislators
 - Board of education
 - Local media and notable community leaders
- ✓ Information packets
- ✓ Spokespeople (one or two to communicate message)

Social Media

Social media is a great way to generate supporters and share information about your program. ServeOhio is active on Twitter and Facebook with the handle @ServeOhio. **All programs are strongly encouraged to follow and like ServeOhio's social media pages to stay up to date on the latest national service and volunteerism updates.** When sharing information about your program on social media, **please mention and tag** ServeOhio in your posts.

Additionally, we encourage you to send us pictures, great stories, videos and upcoming events that we can feature on our Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as on our blog. Please send this information on a regular basis to the Outreach & Education Officer.

Questions to ask when building your social media strategy:

- What networks are you using?
- Who is your audience?
- How are you engaging your audience?
- How frequently are you posting?
- What are you sharing?

Social media best practices:

- Develop engaging, yet concise content
- Use high-quality photos (AmeriCorps logo visible)
 - Facebook – 1200 x 630
 - Twitter – 440 x 220
 - LinkedIn – 400 x 400
- Include data points/numbers to show impact – format as infographics, as applicable
- Tag ServeOhio and AmeriCorps
- Use hashtags related to your project or initiative
- Incorporate video as much as possible

Video tips:

- Grab attention in the first few seconds of the video
- Get your branding/logo visible right away
- Tell your audience a story
- Average length of videos is 1-3 minutes depending on where it is being used
- Include a CTA (call to action)
- Make sure your video works without sound and enable closed captioning
- Reach out to the Outreach & Education Officer for additional video resources

Earned Media

Maintaining relationships with media outlets can help to publicize your program, acknowledge your funders and strengthen your voice to those you serve. Additionally, positive media relations strengthens your organization's reputation as a trusted and credible resource in your community.

Questions to ask when building your earned media strategy:

- Who are your local media? Which reporters cover your beat?
- How are you proactively engaging with the media?
- Who is your spokesperson?
- Who are the frontline volunteers who can share their story?
- How are you monitoring results/impact?

Earned media best practices:

- Understand the publication's target audience
- Identify your local reporter (e.g. find out who covers non-profits, education, community events, etc.)
- Create short, engaging "pitches" in a two or three paragraph email with all the important details (e.g. what is happening, who is involved, when and where is it happening, why does this matter to the reporter's readers/viewers/listeners?)
- Don't include large email attachments as they can sometimes get caught in spam filters – provide a link to where photos can be downloaded
- Highlight the opportunities available to the reporter (e.g. one-on-one interview, great visual/photo opportunity, etc.)
- Be respectful of the reporter's deadline and follow-up – they have a job to do just like you do

Submit a letter to the editor:

In addition to proactive media pitching, another great way to communicate your messages through the media is to submit a letter to the editor, which appears in the editorial section of the newspaper (a section often read by Ohio legislators and community/business leaders):

- Share an opinion that addresses an issue or event
- Be concise (200-250 words depending on the outlet) – check publication for specific guidelines
- Include data points to show the impact of service in the community
- Send to the publication's editor via email (paste letter in the body of the email instead of as an attachment)
- Alternatively, some outlets have an online form that you can submit the letter through
- All newspapers will ask for your phone number so that they can verify the letter is being submitted by you. This information will not be shared publicly
- Please see the example on the next page:

AmeriCorps service adds value to area

This fall marks the 25th anniversary of AmeriCorps — a national service program that engages more than 80,000 Americans in intensive service each year at nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community organizations across the country.

As a proud alumnus, having served in Youngstown from 2017 to 2019, I can personally attest to the power of national service. During my term, I served at Youngstown State University, Choffin Career and Technical Center, and other various high schools in the surrounding area. Through my service I worked to increase the awareness of health disparities in the community while empowering the students to create change by enacting a community service project.

In the past 25 years, more than 35,000 Ohio residents have stepped forward and committed to AmeriCorps — giving 65 million hours of service and earning \$118.2 million in education awards.

AmeriCorps is a proven program that brings tangible benefits to the communities being served. It strengthens the impact of Ohio's nonprofits and faith-based organizations by building capacity and creating innovative, sustainable programs. AmeriCorps expands educational and economic opportunity for its members. And it improves civic participation and encourages community involvement to develop long-term solutions.

My term as an AmeriCorps member changed my life and I have watched it change the lives of hundreds of others who continue to make a difference every day. Together, AmeriCorps members are getting things done to make our state stronger and better.

TYLER POULAKOS

AmeriCorps member,

2017-2019

Samples

Use these samples as templates or create your own compliant messaging.

Sample AmeriCorps “Accomplishment” Core Messages

COMMUNITY

- (Program) has provided (list services)
- (Program) members have contributed (x) hours over (x) years
- More than (x) people have been served by (program) over the past (x) years

STATE

- ServeOhio addresses Ohio's most critical needs by investing in high-impact, evidence-based AmeriCorps programs.
- In PY 2020-21, more than 900 AmeriCorps members will provide 1.2 million hours of service throughout the state and earn \$4.2 million in education awards.
- Ohio AmeriCorps members serve at more than 500 schools, nonprofits, government, faith-based and community organizations working with more than 26,000 youth across the state.
- Since 1994, more than 36,000 Ohio residents have served more than 58 million hours and have qualified for Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than \$123.8 million.

NATIONAL

(Note: Click [here](#) to access the most recent national AmeriCorps impact stats and infographics.)

- AmeriCorps engages 75,000 women and men in service each year benefiting millions of Americans.
- Members are placed in areas of education, healthy futures, economic opportunity, veterans, environmental stewardship and disaster services in 21,600 nonprofits, schools, public agencies and community and faith-based groups across the country.
- Since 1994, more than 1 million men and women have served in AmeriCorps, providing more than 1.4 billion hours of service and earning more than \$3.6 billion in scholarships, more than \$1 billion of which has been used to pay back student loan debt.

Sample Press Release



[INSERT PROGRAM LOGO]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
[MONTH DAY, YEAR]

CONTACT: [NAME]
[PHONE]
[EMAIL ADDRESS]

[PROGRAM NAME] Celebrates Community Service with [TYPE OF EVENT] and Highlights Involvement with AmeriCorps
[HIGHEST RANKING SPEAKER/PARTICIPANT] participates in [ENTER EVENT] with community members

OR

Local community members join forces with [PROGRAM NAME] to [ACCOMPLISH WHAT IN THE CITY]
More than XX volunteers and AmeriCorps members will serve at the event

[CITY, STATE]—To [DESCRIBE REASON FOR HOLDING EVENT], more than [NUMBER OF MEMBERS] from [PROGRAM NAME], a program funded *[or: in partnership with]* by ServeOhio, Ohio’s commission on service and volunteerism, have come together today to [DESCRIBE SERVICE EVENT/ACTIVITY].

[HIGHEST RANKING SPEAKER/PARTICIPANT] joined the [EVENT/SERVICE ACTIVITY] on [DATE] to [DESCRIBE INVOLVEMENT]. Other participants included [NAME ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS].

“For [ENTER YEARS IN EXISTENCE] years, [PROGRAM NAME] has helped [LOCAL COMMUNITY] to [DESCRIBE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES AND HIGHLIGHT ACCOMPLISHMENTS],” said [HIGHEST RANKING SPEAKER/PARTICIPANT NAME, TITLE, PROGRAM NAME]. “Thanks are due to ServeOhio, which administers the AmeriCorps grant that supports [LOCAL PROGRAM].”

Across Ohio, members in AmeriCorps programs, similar to [PROGRAM NAME], work hard to help solve Ohio’s critical economic challenges by improving the lives of thousands of our most vulnerable citizens. Every day, they help children learn to read, rebuild communities struck by environmental tragedies, transform failing schools and revitalize communities. They do this through direct service and by mobilizing thousands of additional volunteers. ServeOhio and The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) provide AmeriCorps and administer funding to Ohio.

“[LOCAL PROGRAM] AmeriCorps members serve our community with tremendous dedication and enthusiasm,” said [PROGRAM DIRECTOR, TITLE, PROGRAM NAME (if same as in prior quote, only use last name)]. “Without their assistance, we would not be able to provide the services vital to the health and well-being of our community.”

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[LOCAL PROGRAM BOILERPLATE]

About ServeOhio

ServeOhio, Ohio’s governor-appointed commission on service and volunteerism, strengthens Ohio communities through AmeriCorps and volunteer engagement. Through programs and initiatives funded and supported by ServeOhio, thousands of Ohioans of all ages engage in and are recognized for their service. Interested participants may learn more about ServeOhio at www.serveohio.org, or on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Sample Social Posts

Facebook/LinkedIn:

***Use photos to accompany posts when possible.**

Through the AmeriCorps grants administered by @ServeOhio, [PROGRAM NAME] has helped [LOCAL COMMUNITY] to [DESCRIBE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES AND HIGHLIGHT ACCOMPLISHMENTS] for the past [YEARS IN EXISTENCE].

Across Ohio, members in AmeriCorps programs, similar to [PROGRAM NAME], work hard to help solve Ohio's critical economic challenges by improving the lives of thousands of our most vulnerable citizens. We are proud to serve [COMMUNITY] and to continue to work toward [PROGRAM GOAL].

[PROGRAM NAME] is hosting [EVENT TYPE] on [DATE] to celebrate community service and our partnership with @ServeOhio and AmeriCorps.

Twitter (must be under 280 characters):

Through the AmeriCorps grants administered by @ServeOhio, [PROGRAM NAME] has helped [LOCAL COMMUNITY] to [DESCRIBE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES AND HIGHLIGHT ACCOMPLISHMENTS] for the past [YEARS IN EXISTENCE].

Ohio AmeriCorps programs like [PROGRAM NAME] work hard to help solve critical economic challenges by improving the lives of thousands of our most vulnerable citizens. We are proud to serve [COMMUNITY] and to continue to work towards [PROGRAM GOAL].

[PROGRAM NAME] is hosting [EVENT TYPE] on [DATE] to celebrate community service and our partnership with @ServeOhio and AmeriCorps.