

Volunteer Iowa (Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service)

Quarterly Report:

July 1 – September 30, 2024

AmeriCorps:

The new AmeriCorps program year began in August. Across the 19 AmeriCorps State programs in Iowa, more than 800 members will serve in organizations throughout the 2024-2025 program year. There will also be four planning grants operating this fall. These planning grantees will be focused on developing new programs or expanding current AmeriCorps programs to identify which program design and interventions will meet the changing needs of Iowa communities. The Request for Applications for competitive 2025-2026 AmeriCorps grants was released in September.

Two grants from the Schultz Family Foundation are expanding service activities and access to national service. One of the grants provides eligible AmeriCorps member's financial support if an unexpected expense could create a barrier to continued AmeriCorps service. The other grant is a Youth Mental Health Corps planning grant. This provides resources to Volunteer Iowa to explore opportunities for service in the field of youth mental health. Volunteer Iowa has been collaborating with the Iowa Division of Public Health to expand content for the Community Health Worker certification to include mental health modules.

Commission Business:

Dan Cataldi was elected Commission Chair, along with Ashley Denton as Vice Chair. Dan Koster was re-appointed to chair the Volunteer Engagement Committee. Monica Chavez-Silva and Tim Jacobsen will continue to co-chair the Programs and Development Committee. Greg Sutherland will serve as chair of the Grant Review Committee.

Disaster Response:

Volunteer Iowa staff were tasked through ESF-5 to support communities across Northwest Iowa impacted by flooding this summer. "Just in Time" training and technical assistance was provided to counties across the region on setting up Volunteer Reception Centers (VRC), appropriately tracking volunteer time for FEMA in-kind match, and tracking homeowner needs. An AmeriCorps Disaster Response Team Mission Assignment brought in teams from across Iowa and the country. AmeriCorps teams lead volunteers, mucked and gutted basements, conducted mold suppression activities, and called homeowners to confirm needs were met. Volunteer Iowa also supported D-SNAP sites, with staff and AmeriCorps members coordinating sites, and RIVA AmeriCorps members providing translation services.

Volunteer Iowa continues to support planning efforts in counties across the state. A full day Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) training and practice simulation was provided to the Disaster Ready Quad Cities COAD, helping the community to learn about VRC structure and make decisions to support the activation of local plans. We will have final numbers included in the next quarterly report.

Iowa Mentoring Partnership (Iowa MENTOR):

Iowa MENTOR through a collaboration with MENTOR Minnesota received \$15,000 of private funds to host a MENTOR Black & Brown Girl Summit called DWELL: The Worth Within Us. The one-day event was design to support and uplift girls in Iowa. Thirty woman and girls attend the event at Iowa State University Reiman Gardens. Following the event, a dozen mentors and mentoring program partners met for training with MENTOR National trainers on how to develop a community of practice for mentoring girls across the state of Iowa.

Staff trained six mentoring program partners on the “Becoming a Better Mentor” training series. Iowa MENTOR will start “Adopting a Mentoring Mindset” training in October for mentors. The fifth edition of Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring will roll out next quarter. This edition will include the foundation of program design as well as program evaluation and sustainability.

RSVP

Volunteer Iowa issued contracts to provide state funding to support 19 organizations providing RSVP programming to 66 Iowa counties. The RSVP program engages individuals ages 55 and older in volunteer service to address community needs and to provide high quality volunteer experience that will enrich the lives of volunteers.

Training

Volunteer Iowa AmeriCorps program staff held an in-person AmeriCorps Program Staff training on August 8 for new program staff to introduce them and train them on state and federal regulations, the basics of operating an AmeriCorps program, and to set expectations for the AmeriCorps program year. Volunteer Iowa staff also provide targeted trainings at the start of each program year. Topics covered fall 2024 included: National Service Criminal History Check Overview, AmeriCorps Recruitment Plans, AmeriCorps Budget Development, AmeriCorps Site Supervisor Onboarding, Ongoing Site Supervisor Communication and Support, and Federal Financial Management.

9/11 Day of Service Grant

Thirty organizations completed Day of Service projects in honor of the September 11th Day of Service and Remembrance through Volunteer Iowa’s Training + Implementation funding. Supported by an AmeriCorps grant, these organizations applied to participate in either the City Volunteer Initiative, the Service Enterprise Program, or the Youth Service Board Initiative. These initiatives equipped nonprofits and city governments with the tools, training, and funding needed to enhance their capacity by leveraging volunteer talent and culminated in 9/11 Day of Service project that mobilized volunteers in meaningful service projects that addressed local needs and priorities. Over 2300 volunteers were engaged across the state and 641 expressed a desire to continue service beyond this day. Applications for 2024-2025 Training + Implementation funding cohorts are now open.

VGF ARP Mentoring Grant

Year two of the Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Mentoring Grant began July 1, 2024. Carlisle Community School District, Cedar Valley Catholic Schools-Columbus High School, Dike New Hartford Community Schools, and Hamburg Community Schools have now created mentoring programs to serve their community and strengthen the lives of K-12 students. The mentoring programs

range from strengthening academics and addressing truancy to career exploration and mental health. Each program will now be an Iowa MENTOR program partner, and this second year will be focused on supporting and strengthening the mentoring programs and began the work on how to sustain the programs through community involvement.

Service Learning

Year two of the Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Youth Service-Learning grant began June 20, 2024. The five K-12 public schools continuing on to year two of the grant include Hamburg Community Schools, Waterloo Community Schools, CAL Elementary, Sioux Center Community Schools, and Central Lyon Community Schools. Year two trainings launched in August and were open to any K-12 school or youth-serving organization interested in expanding their knowledge of service-learning. In addition to the five grantees, 20 organizations signed up to participate in the service-learning training cohort.

Volunteer Iowa awarded six nonprofits \$2,500 Empowering Youth Service grants to support the development of meaningful youth service opportunities. Organizations will receive training and implementation funding to develop a youth service-learning project that engages youth in identifying authentic needs within their community and use their knowledge and skills to create a solution to said need. The six organizations funded include Can Play, GMG Elementary, Grandview University, Marine Cadets of Iowa, West Des Moines Community Schools, and Hansen Elementary.

AmeriCorps Seniors

Volunteer Iowa closed out its AmeriCorps Seniors Demonstration Grant. Remaining Foster Grandparent volunteers were transitioned to other volunteer or staff positions within the volunteer stations. Volunteer Iowa continues to grow its Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) including starting new Pen Pal programs in Fremont, Pottawattamie, Woodbury, Monona, Harrison, Shelby and Mahaska counties. Volunteer Iowa RSVP is working to identify volunteer partnership opportunities in Cass, Montgomery, Poweshiek and Iowa counties.

AmeriCorps VISTA

Volunteer Iowa received a federal grant from AmeriCorps to operate a statewide VISTA program to research, create, and expand programming for eligible public and nonprofit organizations to utilize service as a strategy to further their mission. The intent of the VISTA program is to support programming that helps alleviate poverty for the many Iowans that struggle to find adequate housing, transportation, health and mental health services, and much more. This is the 18th year Volunteer Iowa has received this funding. This program year we have 19 VISTA members serving 12 organizations. The organizations currently hosting a VISTA member are Centrally Rooted, Dubuque; Des Moines Police Department; Disaster Prepwise, Iowa City; Fort Madison Area Arts Foundation; Hope to Shine, Des Moines; Independence School District; Iowa MENTOR, Iowa Youth Writing Project, Iowa City; NAMI Dubuque; NAMI Southwest Iowa, Neola; and Corinthian Baptist Church, Des Moines.