

SERVE WASHINGTON



2023-2025 State Service Plan



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Our mission

Serve Washington advances national service, volunteerism, and civic engagement to improve lives and expand opportunities to meet local critical needs of residents of Washington and strengthen community capacity while creating healthy and resilient communities.

Our vision

National service, volunteerism and civic engagement are the foundation for caring communities and a thriving Washington.

Our values

We believe national service and volunteerism have the potential to break down social barriers and help alleviate generational poverty, especially when we embrace diversity, equity and inclusion. We strive to give all Washingtonians the opportunity to contribute their full measure of talent and perspective through service and work.

To meet this value, national and volunteer programs must include the full participation, inclusion, engagement and empowerment of individuals from different races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, national origins, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, ideologies and other attributes that make us human. We strive to build a service culture where inclusiveness is a reflex – not an initiative – and that we honor the lived experiences that make us human.

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State Service Plan principles and roles

In writing this plan, Serve Washington affirms the following principles that guide our work:

All types of service strengthen our state.

Let us not forget the value of informal channels such as helping a neighbor who is homebound by doing their shopping or mowing their lawn, babysitting a neighbor's child without payment, or coaching a sports team.

Volunteerism and national service are fundamental to engaged and resilient communities.

Let us grow opportunities so all Washingtonians have an opportunity to serve.

Volunteerism and national service create pathways to future opportunity.

Let us reinforce pathways by investing in the leadership skills of those serving and providing benefits for those who serve.

High-quality volunteer and national service programs must be planned, managed and supported.

Let us find ways to support the skills and capacity of those leading volunteer and national service programs.

Strategies to deploy service must be designed in partnership with anchor institutions and guided by locally identified needs.

Let us balance our approach and requirements for being responsive to community and organizational needs.

This plan outlines Serve Washington's role to:

- Inspire service as a strategy to meet local community and organizational needs.
- Nurture our culture of service.
- Support connections among parties in the volunteer ecosystem.
- Develop and support high-quality national service and volunteer experiences and programs.



"Vet Corps has given me a sense of purpose in my life. When I was discharged from the Marine Corps, I had no idea what to do. I worked multiple jobs that I did not like. Then I found Vet Corps. I applied to serve in the program, and it was the best decision I have ever made. The most rewarding part of Vet Corps is being able to help veterans and have an impact on their lives."

Anthony Alvarado
Vet Corps alum



Our approach to gathering information about service in Washington

Over the course of developing the plan, we did the following:

- Refined our ideas of intended impacts and indicators.
- Designed and implemented a methodology that used qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data.
- Identified themes and findings.
- Considered the implications of those findings to the plan's development.

Serve Washington updated its statewide needs assessment from 2018-2019. We began in 2022 and completed it in 2023. The original assessment included reviewing statewide data and coordinating an online survey, stakeholder focus groups, listening sessions, and key informant interviews.



Statewide data review (2022)

Serve Washington staff conducted a review of county level data from a variety of sources, including the [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program](#), [Washington State Employment Security Department](#), and [the Kids Count Data Center](#). We examined the need based on key indicators such as poverty, unemployment, education, and health. We then compared this county-level data to the number of national service members and service locations in each county. In many cases, the counties with the highest needs were those with limited resources. We are using this information to ensure that all counties benefit from Serve WA resources.

Our staff also reviewed the information and results in [The 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington](#). This document further informed us of needs that exist in the state that we can address through our state service plan goals and success measures.



Online survey

Serve Washington staff conducted an online survey open to any Washington resident. This survey gathered input on community needs and people's level of awareness and engagement with national service and personal volunteerism. It also looked at needs related to volunteer management and recognition. Respondents represented a variety of national service organizations, nonprofits, local government agencies, faith-based organizations, national service participants, community volunteers and more.

We received and reviewed 372 responses on the 2022 survey. The four priorities most respondents identified as "extremely important" included the following:

- Economic opportunity: Affordable housing (73.5% of respondents selected "very important" or "extremely important")
- Health services: Reduce rates of homelessness (72.6% of respondents selected "very important" or "extremely important")
- Health services: Address food insecurity (71.7% of respondents selected "very important" or "extremely important")
- Environmental stewardship: Protect clean air and water (71.4% of respondents selected "very important" or "extremely important")



Write-in comments varied, but some themes included senior services and mental health services.

Over 88% of respondents selected “yes” when asked if they thought there is a role to serve or volunteer for roles that would help address the community priorities they selected.

On our 2018 survey, 20.7% of respondents said they were “very familiar” with Serve Washington. On the 2022 survey, respondents marking “very familiar” rose to 36.3%.

47% of respondents selected they were not aware that Community Emergency Response Team, CERT, trainings are available and generally free of charge.



Community-based volunteerism

While our work has been strongest in the national service area, we have distinct responsibilities to support community-based volunteerism. In 2021, Washington ranked 25 for volunteer rates, according to data from [a collaboration between AmeriCorps and the U.S. Census Bureau](#). Even at that ranking, the volunteer contribution to our state is significant, with more than 1.5 million (1,545,834) formal volunteers contributing 118.7 million hours of service through organizations worth an estimated \$4.1 billion. Clearly, the impact of volunteerism is valuable to Washington communities. Knowing that – and knowing our ranking has fallen from 9 to 25 since 2012 – it was important to include community volunteerism questions as we gathered data.

Engaging with volunteers and National Service Participants

In our online survey, just over 56% of respondents (out of 332) indicated they engage national service members (and possibly volunteers) or that they engage volunteers only. 66% of those selected that their volunteer or national service program benefits their organization through direct service. Finally, “member/volunteer recruitment” was the top challenge these respondents identified.

Programs have insufficient resources to support volunteer engagement. Research conducted by Reimagining Service partners (which included Common Good Careers, Deloitte, the Taproot Foundation, the RGK Center for Philanthropy at the University of Texas and the TCC Group) shows that for an organization operating a volunteer program — and for a community to realize the full benefit of volunteerism — key principles must be in place.

These include:

- Individuals and organizations within the volunteer ecosystem must collaborate.
- Volunteering must be a core strategic function, not an add-on.
- Volunteer engagement should focus on true community needs.
- To see a return, you must invest.

While we know many organizations and communities are doing good work through volunteerism, they are likely not achieving the full return of what limited investment they are making.



Challenges to finding the right volunteers

Organizations with *high-quality volunteer program attributes* still face barriers to finding the right number and the right skilled volunteers. This happens even if the attributes include planning and development, leadership support, resource allocation, tracking and evaluation, outreach, effective training, and partnering to extend outreach. During our 2018 survey, participants identified these challenges:

- People do not have personal time (58%).
- People do not know about volunteer opportunities (56%).
- People feel disconnected from their community (43%).

Additional comments emphasized the following:

- While opportunities exist, they do not fit with people's skills/interests or time availability (i.e., require too long of a commitment or take place during work hours).
- People are struggling with poverty and trying to earn an income to meet basic needs, so volunteering isn't feasible.
- Organizational issues related to volunteer management create barriers (e.g., organizations not supporting the volunteer program/not having adequate staffing or resources/not knowing how to effectively use volunteers).



Out of Washington's 39 counties, 10 had no one responding to the survey or only 1 person responding (an decrease from 17 counties in the previous survey). These 10 counties are primarily rural, but still reflect a gap in data collection. Most respondents, 41.3%, described living in an urban area while 27.5% (up from 16.6% in the previous survey) described living in a rural area and 26.2% in a suburban area.

We asked respondents to select their race/ethnicity and allowed them to select all that apply. Responses (284 responses to the question; many skipped this item or selected "prefer not to say") showed differences in proportion to the population of Washington, according to 2020 Census. The chart below shows what survey respondents selected versus 2020 Census data for our state:

	Serve Washington survey responses	2020 Census data
White alone	68%	61.6%
Black alone (Black or African American)	6.3%	12.4%
Hispanic/Latinx	7.7%	18.7%
Asian alone	5.6%	6%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	5%	1.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	1%	0.2%
Some other race alone	<1%	8.4%
Two or more races	6.7%	10.2%

Stakeholder focus groups and listening sessions (2018-2019)

Serve Washington staff conducted a series of informal and formal focus groups and listening sessions with AmeriCorps program representatives, college students, nonprofit leaders, volunteer managers, Retired and Senior Volunteer program directors and tribal leaders.

Several key themes emerged from these sessions:

- National service often emphasizes how service can solve unmet community needs. While meeting these needs is important, we heard we must continue to emphasize and invest in service as an opportunity path for members and invest in their leadership opportunities and skills.
- Both the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing were mentioned as challenges impacting national service member recruitment and retention. We also received comments that these two factors may have unintended consequences related to service being accessible to all Washingtonians.
- Service leaders requested learning, networking, and convening opportunities to strengthen volunteer management skills and increase cross-sector collaborations.
- Service and volunteerism need a cultural context to be responsive and appropriate for a community need.
- Strengthening service and volunteer opportunities requires greater collaboration and investment across government, business, philanthropic and nonprofit organizations.

While the focus group and listening session data collection occurred as part of our original needs assessment, which was pre-COVID, several of the themes above are consistent with what we currently hear. These continue to inform our work. Throughout the pandemic, we collected additional input through the following:

- Serve Washington Legislative report titled How State Government Can Better Invest in Volunteers.
- A Volunteer Efforts During COVID-19 survey implemented by University of North Carolina Charlotte.
- A Volunteer Recognition Diversity Equity Inclusion Assessment completed by Kauffman and Associates Inc.
- Participation in the Washington Department of Health After Action review assessing volunteer program engagement and ways we might strengthen that in future emergencies.

These reports reiterated the need (and demand) for volunteer management training and networking opportunities, for organizations to prioritize responding to why volunteers are needed rather than simply increasing numbers, and for organizations to be more strategic, creative and flexible with their volunteer management.



Identifying gaps, patterns, and insights

Through these data collection processes, we identified data gaps, patterns, and key insights. The most significant insights are described in the following narrative.

Alignment of national service resources and community needs

The 2021-22 Service Footprint map shows that Serve Washington and AmeriCorps still have no presence in Pend Oreille or Columbia counties, which has not changed since 2018-19. We lost sites in Adams (AC National) and in Garfield (AC Seniors-RSVP) counties, which eliminated Serve Washington or AmeriCorps presence this year.

In addition to the counties listed above, the following counties also have no AmeriCorps state presence: Wahkiakum, Pacific, and Klickitat (these last two counties did have AC state presence from WSC/WRC in 2018-2019).

The priority counties to focus our work in the last SSP were Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Mason, Wahkiakum, and Yakima.

The counties who currently score highest on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index include Grays Harbor, Okanogan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, Adams, Lewis, Yakima, Franklin, and Cowlitz.

Some of these counties also show up on the list of counties considered most “distressed,” where the three-year unemployment rate is at least 20% higher than the statewide average (Ferry, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Pend Oreille, Yakima, and Mason).

Counties with over 20% child poverty rates are Adams, Ferry, Jefferson, Mason, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Wahkiakum, Yakima.

County Health Rankings shows Ferry, Pend Oreille, Grays Harbor, Okanogan, Yakima, Asotin, Lewis as the seven counties with lowest health outcomes. Health outcomes tell us how long people live on average within a community, and how much physical and mental health issues people experience in a community while they are alive. (The data we used to create the rankings comes from a variety of sources such as National Center for Health Statistics, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates).

Data filtered by veterans and military families show that our high-need counties are Island, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Spokane.

Serve Washington elected to narrow its review of county data to areas that align with national service focus areas of economic opportunity, education, healthy futures, children and youth, and opioid usage. Despite this focus, we recognize that for national service to be effective, it must respond to local and state trends such as environmental work and tribal priorities – not just federal trends.

What we heard was reinforced when we analyzed the qualitative data from our key informant interviews, and came up with these statements that guide our action plan:

- To sustain and grow opportunities for Washingtonians to serve or volunteer, we must continue to support and build service leaders.
- We need to make investing in service and volunteerism an easy, bottom-line decision.

Our strategic direction is guided by this plan's goals, which come from the understanding we gained from gathering the data. The plan does not reflect everything we hope to accomplish, nor does it represent a binding set of directives, because the planning process must be fluid and flexible. It will, however, serve as the framework we follow to make decisions, focus our resources, and work to expand our reach.

- People manage volunteer and national service programs because they want to help the individuals serving to grow and gain skills. It is with this sense of purpose that these managers then work on compliance matters and grow their own development skills. It's this personal connection — more than any single overarching reason — that leads managers to apply service as a strategy. Preserving this tie is imperative for us to meet our objective as a funder to sustain and grow national service and volunteer programs in our state.
- Members should experience service as a pathway to opportunity.
- We want to ensure organizations demonstrate service leadership and are invested in national service and volunteer programs.
- Organizations need increased knowledge and capacity to use service as a strategy.

Our strategic direction and goals

Goal 1: Expand access to national service or volunteer resources to all 39 counties by 2025.

Washington has 39 counties. When examining how Washingtonians can get involved in service or volunteering, we discovered that resources across four areas (AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps Seniors, CERT, and Volunteer Centers), were not available in four counties. Thirteen additional counties currently offer only one of those resources. Serve Washington distributes resources and partners with AmeriCorps and subgrantees to support service and volunteerism resources in our state. This goal is about better understanding individual county needs and making sure service resources such as funding, national service members (State and National, NCCC, VISTA and AmeriCorps Seniors) and/or volunteers, training events, service events, and leadership or programs benefit all counties equitably.

Goal 2: Identify and remove barriers that marginalized communities experience when they want to participate in service and volunteerism. We will provide all Washingtonians an opportunity to contribute their full measure of talent and perspective through service, and will support national service programs and volunteer leaders to create and sustain a service network that practices cultural awareness and humility. To do this effectively, we need to understand the barriers that we unintentionally create or uphold. Our success will be measured by the barriers we address.

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Goal 3: Partner with nonprofits, business, philanthropy, and government so we can develop additional resources and funding sources to grow national service, volunteerism, and civic engagement. We heard throughout the data gathering process that service and volunteer programs are under-resourced. Resources are allocated by leaders, and that service leadership takes place at all levels within an organization, a community and a state. With this goal, we hope to connect with, sustain and build a network of service leaders. In our vision, these leaders demonstrate their commitment to service by leveraging their resources and connections so that service is deployed as a strategy to meet organizational missions and community needs.

Goal 4: Make Serve Washington a culture of excellence and an employer of choice organization. We will do this by increasing operational efficiencies, team communication, employee development, and employee satisfaction. If, as a team, we are going to accomplish Goals 1-3, we need to focus on our own team development and growth.

We will support the strategic direction and achievement of our plan by using a dashboard that breaks goals into success measures and assigns a point-of-contact to track our progress achievement. We will review our progress at our monthly team meetings and share it at each quarterly commission meeting. Timelines with anticipated due dates have been set for each success measure, and we will track whether work on each one has not been started, is on track, behind or complete.

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State Service Plan background

Washington has a long history of community and national service that predates AmeriCorps and state service commissions such as Serve Washington. Early and successful examples include The Washington Conservation Corps — modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s and 1940s – and the Washington Service Corps. Both promoted community service and youth employment. Today, they operate as AmeriCorps programs, receiving federal funds that are matched (at different levels) with state and local resources.

Washington also invests in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, recognizing the value of tapping into the skills and energies of individuals older than 55.

The benefits of operating these programs are clear on several levels: National research shows that national service and community volunteerism are associated with higher odds for employment for individuals who are out of work. Longitudinal studies completed by the Corporation for National and Community Services on AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers and the health benefits of service show that AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers are healthier, less depressed and more connected to their community compared to individuals who do not volunteer regularly. (This includes volunteers in the Retired Senior Volunteer program (RSVP)).

However, a strong history does not automatically equate to a strong future. Without sustained leadership and investment in service strategies, these legacies are at risk. The State Service Plan is a three-year, comprehensive national and community service blueprint to help with this. The plan sets state priorities while aligning with the most recent AmeriCorps agency Strategic Plan and Equity Action Plan, as well as the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act.

It also serves as a mechanism to identify risks, capitalize on opportunities, and sustain and grow our state's investment in 'service as a strategy'. While aspirational, it is also realistic. Serve Washington staff will monitor the plan and make revisions, as necessary. In addition, our staff and the commission will review the goals and objectives on an annual basis.



Our work

Serve Washington's work is guided by the leadership of commissioners that the governor appointed who use their skills and expertise to meet Serve Washington's responsibilities ([Executive Order 16-08](#)):

- Comply with federal requirements pertaining to State Commissions on National and Community Service, outlined at 42 U.S.C. § 12638.
- Seek additional sources of non-federal funds, especially private funds, to meet matching requirements and build upon existing service initiatives.
- Provide recommendations to the governor pertaining to legislative or policy initiatives that promote the ethic of service.
- Identify existing and new policies or practices that lead to the expansion of national service opportunities in Washington and support federal programs and efforts that expand national service.
- Provide the leadership and vision, alongside local volunteer organizations, civic and community groups, and units of government, to make service a part of the lives of all Washingtonians.