



AmeriCorps “Together We Prepare” Program FAQs

When does the program begin?

The start date for the next ATWP Program is September 2010.

What are the primary service activities of the ATWP program?

ATWP members will:

- Serve on national disaster assignments, supporting Red Cross relief efforts and provide emergency assistance to families affected by disasters.
- Respond to local daytime disaster calls to provide emergency assistance to families affected by disasters.
- Increase community preparedness.
- Be involved in their own personal and professional development, gaining new knowledge and skills.

How do ATWP sites vary?

At all sites, members will provide vital emergency assistance to victims and communities affected by disaster and increase preparedness among community members, focusing on children and youth, before disasters strike. However, there may be differences in the kinds of presentations corps members make, based on the needs of each community.

There may also be variation in the types of member development activities that take place and which Red Cross department oversees their service activities.

You may also ask site-specific questions during your interview.

Do ATWP members receive attire?

At all sites, members will be provided with the following:

- One AmeriCorps grey t-shirt,
- One AmeriCorps sweatshirt,
- One AmeriCorps polo
- One chapter identification badge
- A DSHR vest, picture ID, and name badge

Members may also receive from their Chapters additional Red Cross attire, such as polo shirts, etc.

What training will an individual receive while in the program?

All members will receive Introduction to Disaster Services, Mass Care Overview, Shelter Operations, Shelter Simulation, Emergency Assistance I, Disaster Logistics, Disaster Public Affairs, International Humanitarian Law, Disaster Mental Health Overview, Working with Total Diversity, Community First Aid, Adult, Infant and Child CPR amongst many others.

Does AmeriCorps have bipartisan support?

Yes. In 1990, President George H. Bush signed in the National Service Act. President Clinton put this act into action, especially with the development of AmeriCorps.

What is the investment benefit of AmeriCorps?

For every \$1.00 invested in AmeriCorps, \$2.60 is the return benefit to the community. *(Source: IBM and University of Michigan study)*

Isn't funding for AmeriCorps likely to be cut in the near future?

There are no bills currently to eliminate AmeriCorps. Once the grant for this year is received, money will not be taken away due to budget cuts.

Though a stipend is provided, this is considered to be a service opportunity, not employment.

Are ATWP members American Red Cross employees?

No. The AmeriCorps Together We Prepare program is a service opportunity, not a job.

Does an ATWP member earn sick leave, comp time, vacation hours, credit hours or overtime?

ATWP members are not employees, therefore they do not accrue sick leave, comp time, vacation hours, credit hours or overtime. However, a supervisor may grant members with time off following a national disaster assignment or after several weekends of service.

How do ATWP members make up service hours lost, since there is no sick leave?

Service hours missed due to sickness can be made up on the weekend, or by taking additional training in the evening.

Will corps members serve on holidays?

Corps members will not be asked to serve on most federal holidays. However, sometimes if a member is on a national disaster assignment, the holiday will be seen as a regular service day. Additionally, ATWP members are required to serve on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. This holiday is "a day ON, not a day off."

Will members get breaks or weekends off?

Weekends are usually off; however, on occasion a community group may only be available for training on a weekend. There is no winter or spring break.

How will the living allowance be paid?

Corps members will receive a bi-weekly living allowance in the form of a check through the local American Red Cross chapter's payroll system. At most sites, members may use direct deposits. All federal and state taxes will be deducted from the living allowance.

Is the living allowance taxable?

Yes. You are responsible for any income taxes owed on any AmeriCorps living allowances you receive. The living allowance amount received in a calendar year is subject to income taxes for that calendar year. For example, if you receive half of your \$10,600 living allowance in 2008 and half in year 2009, the \$5,000 received in 2008 is subject to 2008 income taxes, and the \$5,000 received in 2009 is subject to 2009 income taxes.

After the calendar year in which you earned any living allowance, your AmeriCorps project will send you a W-2 form indicating the amount of the allowance you earned in that year.

Is there relocation allowance or relocation assistance?

Unfortunately, the ATWP program cannot assist with relocation expenses. Members who relocate to another area to serve with ATWP must do so at their own expense.

Can I work or go to school while in the program?

Because the program involves the possibility of national disaster deployments for a period of three weeks and there are some evening/weekend service, it is generally not recommended.

What disciplinary procedures will be in place?

Even though AC*ATWP members are not employees, they provide service in a professional environment. The policies and procedures of the American Red Cross apply. These policies will be discussed during the training portion of the program.

What is the recommended attire?

Members are required to wear either professional business attire, or black slacks / skirts, with an American Red Cross ATWP polo shirt. Additional guidance will be provided by the local American Red Cross Human Resources representative.

Are ATWP members eligible for unemployment benefits?

No. AmeriCorps members are not employees and do not qualify for unemployment benefits following their term of service.

If I complete 1700 hours, can I receive my education award and leave the program early?

No. In order to qualify for an education award, a member must complete at least 1700 hours, AND successfully complete the 10.5-month program.

Does service with the ATWP program guarantee a paid staff position with the American Red Cross?

No.

RECRUITMENT

What are the minimum requirements to be considered for the ATWP program?

Applicants must be willing to participate in a program which will require a commitment to national and community service. Those selected to participate should be able to complete the 10.5 months of service without interruption. The person must also be available for at least one three-week deployment with little advance notification. Furthermore, AC*ATWP is a drug-free environment; therefore drug use will not be tolerated.

Minimum eligibility requirements:

- Available full-time, including some weekends and evenings
- Able to mobilize on disaster assignments for up to 21 days with little advance notice
- A current and valid driver's license
- At least a GED or high school diploma
- A U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident alien of the U.S.
- Interested in teaching and training in addition to disaster response
- Demonstrate professionalism, flexibility, initiative, and be team oriented.

What is the application process?

Completed applications should be submitted directly to each ATWP site of choice. Each ATWP site will conduct at least one candidate interview.

Final selections are based on meeting minimum eligibility criteria, qualifications, service experience, and the needs of the local American Red Cross chapter. Candidates will be notified by the ATWP site at least three weeks in advance of the start date.

ATWP slots are filled based on a rolling admission.

Which American Red Cross chapters fill their ATWP slots first?

It varies year by year. However, American Red Cross chapters with four or fewer ATWP slots tend to fill them faster than those with more. Therefore, candidates are strongly encourage to submit completed applications as soon as possible.

How many ATWP slots are available?

For the 2008-2009 term of service, the NPRC program will recruit to fill 25 full-time stipend * AmeriCorps slots.

Is there an age limit to participate in AmeriCorps*ATWP?

Yes. Minimum age requirement is 18. However, there is no upper age limit restriction.

Do AmeriCorps*ATWP members have to be US citizens?

No. But if they are not a citizen, they must be a legal permanent resident, a U.S. national or have Native American status. Applicants will be required to bring proof of citizenship or naturalization on the first day of service. Those without the appropriate documents will not be enrolled into AmeriCorps.

Can persons with felony convictions participate?

Persons with felony convictions or juveniles with felony adjudications may apply. The circumstances of each conviction will be reviewed, along with the time since the conviction and conduct subsequent to the conviction.

Do I have to have a Driver's License?

Yes, a current valid license is required for participation in the program.

Do I have to have my own car? Will I be able to use American Red Cross vehicles?

A personally owned vehicle is required for participation in the program. Access to and use of American Red Cross vehicles is limited and contingent upon the availability of said vehicles (which are often shared by more than one department), the ATWP member's prior driving record, and often, proof of auto insurance. American Red Cross vehicles are restricted to business use only.

Do ATWP members have to have a High School diploma or GED?

Yes. As a requirement of the national disaster system, members must possess at least a GED or High School diploma.

Do ATWP members have to speak English?

Yes. Participants will need to speak and understand at a level sufficient to teach and train members of the community in disaster preparedness and safety.

Do ATWP members have to speak a language in addition to English?

It is not a requirement for acceptance to the program.

Can married persons participate?

Yes. However, the selection of a person for AmeriCorps*ATWP does not guarantee that the spouse will also be selected.

HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Is the health care coverage premium taken out of the living allowance?

No. The health care coverage premium is paid on a cost share basis by CNCS and the American Red Cross chapter, and it is not deducted from the member's living allowance.

Does the health care coverage work like most insurance plans?

The AmeriCorps health care plan is designed to reimburse plan participants for eligible medical expenses incurred as a result of non-occupational accidents or sickness.

What is the coverage for glasses/contacts?

Services in connection with eye examination, eyeglasses or contact lenses or hearing aids, are not covered except as required for repair caused by an injury.

Is a corps member covered under this medical plan while he/she is out of the state?

Yes.

What if a corps member has dependents (spouse or children)? Are they covered under the AmeriCorps health care plan?

No. Only the AmeriCorps member is covered.

If a corps member is currently covered by his/her parents' or other medical program, should he/she continue this coverage?

Since the coverage through the AmeriCorps health care plan is limited, we may suggest that they continue with the previous policy.

When does my health care coverage begin?

Health insurance is activated the day the member begins service with the NPRC program, not the date that they are selected for participation.

When does the health care coverage terminate?

All health insurance is terminated the last day of the month in which the member ends their service.

CHILD CARE BENEFITS

How does the child care benefit work?

A Corps member who is a legal parent or guardian, residing with the child may be eligible. The member household must be income eligible and the child(ren)'s caregiver must be considered a legal provider in the state. There is no fee for the member unless the provider charges more than the market rate.

Is there an age restriction for children covered by this benefit?

Only members with children younger than 13 years of age can receive assistance.

How much childcare assistance can a corps member receive?

Corps members are allotted the market rate. However, there is no standard or nationally.

Is the childcare allotment taxable?

Yes.

THE NATIONAL SERVICE TRUST, EDUCATION AWARD AND LOAN DEFERMENT**What is the National Service Trust?**

Funds to cover the Education Award and interest deferral benefits are held in the National Service Trust, a fund established by Congress expressly for that purpose. The Office of the National Service Trust is the office that manages all the various functions related to the Education Award. We estimate there is sufficient funding in the National Service Trust to meet all payments requested by past and currently enrolled AmeriCorps members. For more information visit the National Service Trust contact page for more information

(<http://www.americorps.org/members/resource/education/contact.html>).

How can I contact the National Service Trust?

If you have questions or problems with your Education Award, you can contact the toll-free information line at 1-888-507-5962. Trust specialists are on hand from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST Monday through Friday.

What is the total education award amount for which a full-time ATWP member is eligible?

\$4,725 (Four thousand seven hundred and twenty-five dollars).

For what can an education award be used?

The education award may be used for the following purposes:

- To repay outstanding qualified student loans.
- To pay for all or part of the cost of attending a qualified institution of higher education (Title IV school).

- To pay expenses incurred in participating in an approved school-to-work program.

What expenses does the education award cover?

The award can be used to help pay the costs of attendance. The Department of Education has defined the term "cost of attendance" to mean: tuition, normal fees, and required material, equipment and supplies. In addition, each educational institution establishes allowances for room and board, books, supplies, transportation and miscellaneous expenses, which are also included in the cost of attendance.

Will the ATWP member receive the education award as a cash payment?

No. The Trust does not make payments to anyone else other than qualified schools and loan holders.

After an AmeriCorps member successfully completes a term of service, the National Service Trust sends to that member a voucher form that contains the amount of the education award awarded. The voucher form is submitted to either the financial aid office or the loan holder use all or part of the education award for eligible expenses. Contact a financial aid counselor for information on how they handle disbursements and reimbursements.

How long does a corps member have to use the education award?

A corps member must use the award within seven years of the date he/she completes the program. The corps member may apply for an extension of this time period if he/she is performing another term of service in an approved AmeriCorps program or if he/she was unavoidably prevented from using the award during the period. The corps member must apply for an extension before the end of the seven year period.

Can student loans be deferred while participating in the program?

Yes. Under CNCS regulations, an individual who has a qualified student loan and who is serving in an approved AmeriCorps position, must submit a written request to the holder of the loan. This statement should inform the lender that the individual is requesting forbearance for the interest on the loan and should ask the lender to contact the Corporation for National and Community Service in order to verify that the individual qualifies for the forbearance and the period for which the lender must grant forbearance.

Forbearance is a deferment - not loan forgiveness. Additionally, an individual must successfully complete the program in order for the Corporation to pay the interest that has accrued during the individual's service with AmeriCorps *ATWP. Since these benefits are above and beyond the education award, interest payments will not

be deducted from the amount of the award. However, taxes will be due on the amount of interest paid by CNCS.

Are there restrictions to the type of school loans the award can repay?

Yes. The education award may be used to pay qualified education loans. These loans include:

- Federal Family Education Loan Program, including:
 - Federal Stafford Loans,
 - Federal Insured Student Loans(1984 and prior),
 - Guaranteed Student Loans (former name for Stafford Loans), and
 - Supplemental Loans for Students.

- Federal Direct Student Loans Program.
- Health Education Assistance Loans
- Loans for Disadvantaged Students
- Primary Care Loans
- Nursing Student Loans.
- Federal Perkins Loans, including:
 - National Defense Student Loan Program and
 - Income Contingent Loan Program.

The educational award, however, may not be used to pay back loans which originated before 1965.

What portion of corps member benefits are considered to be income for Pell Grant purposes? For income tax purposes?

A corps member's benefits will not affect eligibility for any Federal Aid including work-study . The Corporation for National Service has asked financial aid officers not to take the corps member's benefits into account in determining other financial aid such as college or state grants. However, the Corporation cannot guarantee that the benefits will be disregarded in determining eligibility for state aid, college funded grants or private scholarships.

Both the living allowance and the education award are to be included as income for income tax purposes.

Can the education awards be used at more than one school?

Yes. The award can be used to help pay one or more loans, or the costs of attendance at one or more educational institutions or a combination.

Are the living allowance and education award taken into consideration when determining eligibility for public assistance?

In general, no. The National and Community Service Act of 1990, as amended, specifies that a living allowance and other benefits are treated just like income

received by the Job Training Partnership Act participants. This means that a participant's living allowance and other benefits will not affect eligibility for most needs-based Federal programs, including Food Stamps and Section 8 housing. However, the living allowance and other corps Member benefits may count as earned income for programs funded under the Social Security Act, including Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income, and Medicaid.

Can an education award be used to study outside the US?

Many post-secondary institutions offer educational opportunities abroad. As long as the institution is in the US and meets the legal requirements listed above, the corps member may use the education award to study overseas. Foreign schools, however, do not meet the Higher Education Act criteria.

What happens if the corps member does not complete the full term of service?

A member who has served at least 15% of the term of service and is released from service for compelling personal reasons may be eligible to receive a prorated award, based on the length of service. Members who quit for other reasons or who are released for cause are not eligible for any portion of an award.

It is up to the ATWP Operating Site Manager, in consultation with ATWP program staff, to determine the compelling personal circumstances under which they will release a member from a term of service. Examples of circumstances that might be considered are serious illness, injury to the member or the death of an immediate member of the participant's family.

What happens if the corps member withdraws from the school or fails to complete the period of enrollment for which the award has been used?

The school must have a fair and equitable refund policy that complies with the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.

If you withdraw from the school at which you have used the education award, the school may be required to refund the Trust. If any refund is owed, it is credited to your education award "account," and is subject to the seven-year time limit. For general information on how withdrawing from school may affect your student financial aid, go to U.S. Department of Education's Student Guidebook (http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/index.html).

Is the award transferable? For example, if the corps member is unable to use it, can he/she transfer the award to another individual?

No. Only AmeriCorps-approved members are eligible for education awards. The education award may not be transferred to a relative or any other individual under any circumstance.

Will the education award affect the corps members' eligibility for other financial aid?

The education award will not be taken into account in determining eligibility for any federal student aid. The Corporation has no jurisdiction over whether state or private

universities - or private scholarship funds - will take the education award into account in determining eligibility for institutional aid; however, the Corporation has requested that institutions not do so.

Will a corps member have to pay taxes on his/her education award?

Payments made from Education Awards are considered taxable income in the year that the Corporation makes the payment to the school or loan holder. The Corporation will deduct no taxes, but it will send the corps member a Form MISC-1099 to be used in preparing his/her income tax return.

What are the eligibility restrictions for receiving the education award?

You may only earn two education awards. You are eligible to receive one award for each of your first two terms of service, regardless of the length of the term. Full-time, half-time, reduced half-time, quarter time, and minimum time terms of service each count as one term of service. Generally, if you are released for cause before completing your term of service and do not receive an education award, that term of service counts as one of your two terms.

Can I serve a third term with the ATWP, even if I don't receive an education award?

No, you may serve a third term with AmeriCorps but you must serve under a different stream of service. If you have served two terms with the ATWP, you may only serve your third AmeriCorps term under VISTA or NCCC.