



January 2, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

CC: The Honorable Jeff Zients, Chief of Staff
The Honorable Neera Tanden, Assistant to the President and Domestic Policy Advisor

Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to the National and Community Service Act of 1990 [42 U.S. Code § 12651b Section (g)(5)(C)], AmeriCorps' Board of Directors is required annually to review the performance of the agency's Chief Executive Officer and forward a report of that review to the President. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of AmeriCorps, we are pleased to provide this review of CEO Michael Smith. AmeriCorps' Board of Directors is delighted with Michael's skillful leadership to advance your Administration's most pressing priorities. Michael's leadership helps ensure AmeriCorps plays a decisive role in embedding an ethos of national service and civic engagement across our country, while also providing critical human capital and career pathways for nonprofit organizations and municipal services that children and families depend on daily.

Under Michael's leadership, AmeriCorps has risen to the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the political, social, and economic crises of our time to usher in a new era of national service that favors equity, member experience, and community impact. He has made diversity, equity, and inclusion core AmeriCorps values; centered evidence-based strategies and investments; focused on systemic change and policy reform; cultivated relationships with peers at the highest levels of leadership inside and outside of government; doubled down on AmeriCorps' role as a thought leader in conversations that influence civic engagement and philanthropy; boosted AmeriCorps' reputation; and courageously led the Board and his senior team in remedying years of financial mismanagement and underinvestment. When America calls, AmeriCorps answers with smart, innovative, timely, and evidence-based interventions to address the most urgent challenges facing communities.

- **Public-Private Partnerships.** Most recently, AmeriCorps was tapped to serve as the coordinating hub for your American Climate Corps, which will direct thousands of new individuals to meet urgent climate needs while preparing them for the clean energy jobs of the future. In 2022, FEMA and AmeriCorps celebrated the 10th anniversary of FEMA Corps and a five-year renewal of the interagency agreement. AmeriCorps continues to lead the United We Serve campaign and collaborate with other government agencies to bring more national service opportunities to underserved communities as follow up from the United We Stand Summit. Last year, AmeriCorps joined the White House, Department of Education, and other public and private



partners to launch the National Partnership for Student Success, which focuses on meeting your goal to engage 250,000 more adults in student-support roles by 2025. Johns Hopkins University's new findings from September 2023 estimate 187,000 caring adults stepped forward in the last year to provide additional supports to students in schools—nearly 75 percent of your goal. And, AmeriCorps continues its work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to lead Public Health AmeriCorps, an interagency partnership to increase capacity in local public health settings and build the next generation of public health leaders that was supported by an initial \$400 million investment from the American Rescue Plan. Each of these initiatives demonstrates how AmeriCorps is not only meeting the urgent human capital needs of today, but also providing training, credentialing, and certifications to ensure a robust talent pipeline from service to employment. The appendix contains more information.

- **Equity.** AmeriCorps has centered advancing racial equity in all that we do. We are focusing our efforts to reach communities with the deepest poverty, recruit AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers who reflect the diversity and lived experiences of the communities they serve, and invest in programs that create pathways of opportunity for those who serve. For our largest grant programs, in FY 2024 AmeriCorps prioritized funding for community-based programs that create workforce pathways for AmeriCorps members and expand service to second chance youth and/or engage those youth as AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps is also working to reduce barriers to service to ensure service is not a luxury for the few. We increased the living allowance that AmeriCorps members receive from \$8.46 to \$11 per hour in FY 2023 for AmeriCorps VISTA and from \$10.35 to \$11 per hour in FY 2023 for AmeriCorps State and National. We also increased the hourly stipend AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers receive from \$3 in FY 2021 to \$4 in FY 2023. Lastly, we increased the AmeriCorps NCCC member compensation package to \$12.60 per hour, a 10 percent increase over the past two years. This most recent living allowance increases were a significant step toward the Administration's goal of \$15 per hour with additional increases proposed as part of the President's FY 2024 Budget request. The agency also hired its first chief diversity and inclusion officer, continued advancing AmeriCorps' Equity Action Plan, supported a Committee on Native American Affairs led by a senior advisor and special assistant, and hosted the first tribal nations convening in recent history.
- **Evidence.** Nearly 70 percent of AmeriCorps grantees have strong or moderate levels of impact verified by independent entities, ensuring that when our members and volunteers show up, impact is certain to follow. For two years in a row, Results for America recognized AmeriCorps in the "Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence" for our commitment to using data and evidence to underpin the impact of AmeriCorps' community grant investments. AmeriCorps recently released its 2023 State of the Evidence Report, which reiterated serving with AmeriCorps can benefit volunteers' health, partnering with AmeriCorps helps grantees and sponsoring organizations meet their project goals, and investing in community-based solutions generates greater value in return.



- **Policy.** Michael has worked diligently with our general counsel to embark on the first serious policy review process undertaken by the agency in many years. This resulted in bold legislative proposals in your FY 2024 budget, including eliminating the unfair tax on education awards, making it possible for DACA recipients to serve in all AmeriCorps programs, and expanding noncompetitive eligibility so that members who serve in all programs have a path to good federal jobs. A group of bipartisan Congressional leaders recently reintroduced the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award Tax Relief Act, which would provide tax relief for AmeriCorps members who earn Segal Education Awards.
- **Financial and Operational Reform.** At the beginning of your Administration, the agency was suffering from years of underinvestment in its people, processes, and systems, which led to several years of disclaimed audit opinions. AmeriCorps has since made financial and operational reform the agency's top priority and developed a holistic plan to accelerate progress. AmeriCorps worked with the Board to relaunch the Oversight, Governance, and Audit Committee; enhanced governance and decision-making by engaging a financial and operational reform oversight team led by the Chief of Staff and consisting of agency senior executives; onboarded contractors with extensive experience in financial transformation; made significant progress toward modernizing our grant and member management systems; and restored strong and open communication with oversight leadership, including our Office of Inspector General. And, the agency's global employee satisfaction score has increased by 7 percent since 2021.

Despite this tremendous progress, AmeriCorps is also facing historic challenges. Like the military, recruitment has not rebounded since the pandemic. AmeriCorps' commitment to raising living allowances and investing in infrastructure will lead to a much smaller service footprint should Congress not provide additional resources. And, the new House majority's budget proposes devastating cuts to the agency.

We are working in close partnership with Neera Tanden, Assistant to the President and Domestic Policy Advisor, and other senior White House leaders on strategies to combat these obstacles to help raise awareness about AmeriCorps, address recruitment challenges, and encourage engagement from leaders across sectors. These strategies include the following:

- Support budget and policy changes that increase living allowances, reduce barriers to service, and encourage collaborations between the military and national service.
- Commemorate AmeriCorps' 30th anniversary with a signature White House event and private sector call to action
- Present the President's Volunteer Service Award on President Biden, First Lady Dr. Biden, Vice President Harris, or Second Gentleman Emhoff's planned domestic travel
- Record video messages or make calls from all four principals recognizing contributions of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers and encouraging other Americans to serve
- Reinforce AmeriCorps' service challenge for elected officials: calling on governors, mayors, county leaders, and tribal leaders to take action to promote service, advance policy, and expand programming to strengthen national service in their jurisdictions



Thank you for the opportunity to share more about AmeriCorps' accomplishments under the leadership of our CEO Michael Smith. We are confident the agency is making the right investments to ensure success for the next thirty years and beyond. We look forward to working closely together to continue to leverage the power of service to strengthen communities and transform lives. Please see more information in the appendix below.

Sincerely,

Catherine McLaughlin, Chair

CC: AmeriCorps Board of Directors Members:

Leslie Bluhm

Fagan Harris

Lisette Nieves

Flor Romero

Shirley Sagawa

Alvin Warren



Appendix: Advancing Biden-Harris Administration Priorities

Strengthening Workforce Development: AmeriCorps is a proven pathway to employment that provides members workforce skills, training, and hands-on experience to jumpstart their careers. Many AmeriCorps programs provide opportunities to earn credentials or certificates, and some are pre-apprenticeships or Registered Apprenticeships. More than 700 companies and organizations with 2.3 million employees have become Employers of National Service, committing to recruit AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni. AmeriCorps has prioritized workforce development in its strategic plan and funding notices, is working with the Department of Labor and our grantee community to develop more pre-apprenticeships and Registered Apprenticeships, and is working with OPM to increase participation by AmeriCorps alumni in the federal Pathways Programs and make more use of Non-Competitive Eligibility hiring authorities for AmeriCorps VISTA alums.

Addressing Climate Change: AmeriCorps expanded its focus on climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience to support the Administration's whole-of-government response to the climate crisis. Last year, AmeriCorps invested \$117 million in climate and disaster service projects - a 20 percent increase over the previous year. In 2022, AmeriCorps members and volunteers improved more than 3 million acres of parks and public lands, treated 25,000 miles of trails and rivers, weatherized or retrofitted more than 4,800 homes and public structures, and restored over 650 structures after natural disasters.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: AmeriCorps leadership has taken concrete actions to strengthen diversity and remove barriers to service by increasing the AmeriCorps living allowance and AmeriCorps Seniors stipend. We have increased the minimum living allowances to at least \$11 per hour across AmeriCorps programs and \$4 per hour for AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion volunteers. The President's FY 2024 budget would increase the minimum living allowance to the equivalent of \$13 per hour and the stipend to \$4.50 per hour. If enacted, this would be a more than 30 percent increase since the start of the Administration; putting AmeriCorps on a path to \$15 an hour by 2025 as the President called for at the United We Stand Summit last fall.

Building Bridges: By bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to serve, AmeriCorps builds social cohesion and fosters unity - directly advancing the President's fundamental priority to "heal, unite, and rebuild this country we love." In response to the President's call to service at the United We Stand Summit, AmeriCorps launched a multi-year project with Service Year Alliance to develop and share trainings, tools, and effective practices for AmeriCorps members to advance social cohesion and bridging during their terms of service and throughout their lives.

Public Health and Substance Abuse: AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers, including those in our Public Health AmeriCorps programs, help communities meet growing public health needs, address the opioid epidemic, improve access to healthy food, and more. Through their service, they also improve their own health and build pathways to good paying jobs in public health. This work advances the Biden



Administration's priorities on mental health and substance abuse prevention, health care access, and addressing health disparities.

Strengthening Education Success: In 2022, nearly 40,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers (mostly Foster Grandparents) served at nearly 10,000 K-12 schools. AmeriCorps is co-leading the National Partnership for Student Success with the Department of Education to meet the President's call for 250,000 more tutors and mentors to accelerate student recovery and success.

Increasing College Access and Affordability: AmeriCorps members have earned more than \$4.8 billion in Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards to pay for postsecondary education or pay back student loans, advancing the Administration's college access and affordability priority. More than 300 higher education institutions have become Schools of National Service, offering to match the AmeriCorps education award or provide other incentives to AmeriCorps alums. Last year, AmeriCorps awarded \$2.2 million in grants and education award payments to Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Serving and Engaging Veterans and Military Families: AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers are advancing First Lady Dr. Jill Biden's Joining Forces initiative by providing employment services, benefits counseling, transportation, healthcare access, and other support to more than 245,000 veterans, military service members, and their families each year. Approximately 15,000 veterans serve in AmeriCorps programs, applying the skills they gained in the military to meet needs on the home front.

Fighting Hunger and Homeless: AmeriCorps programs reduce disparities by expanding educational and economic opportunity in underserved communities. In 2021, more than 35,000 AmeriCorps members and volunteers addressed hunger and food insecurity for 2.2 million people. AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers provided mentoring and support to 860 homeless children and AmeriCorps VISTA members served 188,000 youth and adults experiencing homelessness.