



## What is the VISTA Food Security Initiative?

- AmeriCorps launched its Food Security Initiative in 2020 as a rapid response during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to create a comprehensive and collaborative approach to hunger.
- AmeriCorps VISTA and select sponsors deepened food security resources, knowledge, and engagement through participation in a Learning Community.
- The Food Security Initiative allowed sponsors to share best practices, bridge silos, and to learn from each other and issue area experts.
- Sponsors received additional resources to expand their food security impact and support AmeriCorps members' service through the end of Fiscal Year 2024.



**164**  
Sites



**290**  
Full time members served



**244**  
Summer Associates



**49**  
Members did multiple service terms



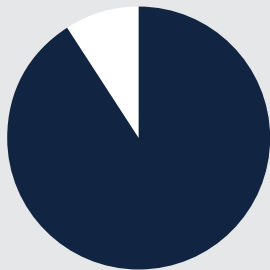
**230,000+**  
Individuals reported increased food security throughout the initiative

# BENEFITS TO SPONSORS AND MEMBERS

## Learning Community Accomplishments

- From 2021-2024, Food Security Initiative sponsors convened in 22 Learning Community meetings.
  - Meetings covered topics such as recruitment, AmeriCorps member orientation and training, disaster resilience, nutrition security, data collection tools, food and mental health, goal setting, cultural competency, and ripple effect mapping.
- Sponsors attended listening sessions and provided feedback for the [National Strategy](#) for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.
  - The Food Security Initiative was highlighted in the National Strategy as part of AmeriCorps' response to alleviate hunger.
- Sponsors supported VISTA through the evaluation of the Learning Community model by participating in focus groups, surveys, and an in-person ripple effect mapping session.
  - From our evaluation, sponsors reported:
    - The Learning Community enhanced their food security knowledge overall and changed how they contextualized their work.
    - The Learning Community served as a “sounding board” where they shared their own program’s successes and challenges.
    - An increase in their overall awareness of how VISTA operates across the country in the food security space.
  - Some sponsors collaborated on their own to plan a professional development series for their AmeriCorps members during 2023 and 2024.
  - Food Security Initiative sponsors have been inspired to create their own Learning Communities among their AmeriCorps members and site supervisors.
  - AmeriCorps VISTA’s Program Specialist visited the Food Security Initiative projects and met with AmeriCorps members to learn about their accomplishments.

## Benefits to Serving with the VISTA Food Security Initiative



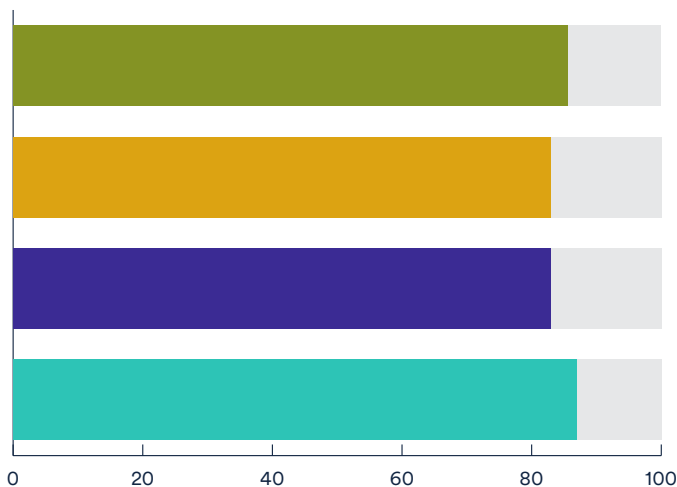
**91% of members** said that they felt like they made a contribution to the community.



**93% of members** said that they felt they made a difference in the life of at least one person.



**86% of members** said that their service experience helped them to further their professional goals and endeavors.



**85.5% of members** were satisfied with their AmeriCorps service.

**83% of members** would recommend serving as an AmeriCorps member in VISTA to a close friend or family member.

**83% of members** said that they were more likely to volunteer for a cause that they care about as a result of their service.

**87% of members** said that their service experience helped them to further their personal goals and endeavors.



# FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE SPONSORS

## Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

 **Augusta, Maine**

Maine Ending Hunger Corps is an AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsored by Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, with the goal of building capacity to fulfill Maine's historic commitment to creating a hunger-free state by 2030. Ending Hunger Corps supports 23 VISTA projects per year, placing AmeriCorps members with organizations across the state that engage in service aligned with the goals of "Everyone at the Table: Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030". By serving at the intersection of poverty and hunger, members with Ending Hunger Corps advance long-term, root cause solutions.



### Project Highlights:

- Through the service of **23 members**, Ending Hunger Corps has:
  - Leveraged **\$1,141,061** in cash and in-kind resources
  - Provided **1,146,938 pounds** of food
- AmeriCorps members accomplished this by:
  - Recruiting **2,964 volunteers**
  - Leading them in nearly **7,400 hours** of volunteer service in their own communities
  - Strengthening the effectiveness and program reach of **3,771 organizations**.



## Ohio Association of Food Banks

 **Columbus, Ohio**

The ShareCorps VISTA pilot project focused on capacity building activities in promotion of healthy futures in Ohio communities. AmeriCorps member capacity building activities included recruiting and coordinating volunteers, securing cash and in-kind resources, developing or improving programming and services, enhancing community food production efforts, and more. Year one focused on COVID-19 response and alternative delivery models. Year two focused on hunger as a social determinant of health. Member projects emphasized the adoption and expansion of Hunger and health/food as medicine initiatives in Ohio's foodbanks, such as healthy "prescription" food box programs and expanded partnerships with free clinics. Participating foodbanks identified opportunities for implementing local and regional models for improved health and wellness through food and nutrition security.

### Project Highlights:

- Between November 2021 and December 2023, Ohio Association of Food Banks reported:
  - **\$2,198,306** - Total resources leveraged
  - **4,466 volunteers** recruited and managed
  - **107,716** - People receiving food access/security support or education
  - **71,218** - People reporting increased food security



*"Our food bank is not just a provider of resources but a catalyst for positive change, impacting lives by addressing both immediate hunger needs and long term health goals."*



**Phillip Hyun**, Health and Hunger Coordinator  
Greater Cleveland Food Bank

# FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE SPONSORS

## [Baylor Collaborative on Hunger & Poverty](#)

 Waco, Texas

AmeriCorps members supported the formation of Hunger Free Community Coalitions across the State of Texas to develop sustainable, local methods to increase food security. They also built individual community efforts into a statewide network to ensure the coalitions continue to have resources, networks, share best practices, and leverage opportunities to increase food security in the future. Members supported building capacity for organizations by designing websites, assisting with marketing, and researching funding opportunities.



### Project Highlights:

- In 2023, AmeriCorps members in the VISTA program worked on projects including:
  - Community outreach
  - Resource mapping
  - Grant writing and resource development
  - Organizational development, and data tracking
- Members mobilized **445 community volunteers** in **2,155 service hours**.

*“In January, we partnered with 14 organizations...to prepare and pass out meals to residents. Together, we gave out a total of 2,857 meals to Abilene residents... As a result of this program, 73.3% of residents reported their level of food security having improved.”*



**Jacob**, AmeriCorps member, VISTA program  
Abilene Big Country Hunger Coalition

## [Arizona Food Bank Network](#)

 Phoenix, Arizona

VISTA projects improved sustainable food access in under-resourced communities. Members bolstered sustainable local food systems, improved food pantries' organizational capacity and sustainability, expanded community engagement, and increased the pounds of emergency nutritious food distributed. Members also assisted with mapping, volunteer recruitment, combating child food security within Native American populations, food access for older adults, service-learning projects with youth, and developing resources and partnerships.

### Project Highlights:

- Members built capacity for local communities by:
  - **Developing an interactive tool** that educates older adults and seniors about different food assistance programs like SNAP.
  - **Organizing and helping run a Tribal Food Sovereignty Workshop** in the San Carlos Apache Tribe, working with an experienced indigenous food sovereignty consultant. The 22 attendees identified priorities and next steps to take.





# FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE SPONSORS

## Fundación Bucarabón

 Maricao, Puerto Rico

The Fundación Bucarabón VISTA project collaborated with community partners to ensure food security for an active and healthy lifestyle. AmeriCorps members identified key community stakeholders, designed a food security digital portal with content to support food security, increased community awareness on food insecurity, trained and supported farmers to obtain grants and social supports, and researched and developed food safety strategies in partnership with existing collaborators.

### Project Highlights:

- The foundation's workforce and economic development programming engages **substantial numbers of women** in Maricao community in their workshops and trainings.
- The project began with 20 farmers, now their network engages **more than 800 farmers** around the island.
- Fundación Bucarabón has more than five acres of land producing food. Their gardens have grown **more than 250 lbs.** of peppers and beans.
- Through partnerships with the island's food bank, they serve fresh food deliveries to community members and students, **servicing 750+ families.**

- The foundation has provided **kits and trainings for 12 families** to manage their own hydroponics farms, using water-based nutrients instead of soil, to be able to be self-sustaining with their own fish and produce, as well as to sell surplus for their own income.



*"We wanted to integrate the concept [of food sovereignty] from the beginning...it ties to climate change...[it's] what we give back to nature."*



**Urayoán Fernández Rosario**  
VISTA Farm Developer, Fundación Bucarabón

## University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

 Fayetteville, Arkansas

AmeriCorps members focused on serving with organizations across the state to meet the needs of Arkansas' most vulnerable and underserved populations. Members expanded capacity and ability to increase food access through their service in the charitable food system, supported local agriculture and production programs, improved coordination and connection to essential services that impact food security, and increased availability to culturally and medically appropriate foods.

### Project Highlights:

- Members **increased the number of volunteers** serving food security issues **by 2,500.**
- This increase in volunteer service in the community translates to:
  - **10,000** hours
  - **\$30,000** in cash donations
  - **\$100,000** in in-kind donations for food security
  - **160,000** Arkansans served



*"I feel very proud of how much produce we have donated to local students in northwest Arkansas! We have had a couple rounds of 200+ bags in one day, which is very exciting. I am also proud of the volunteers I've recruited and seeing them work and fit in with our programs."*



**AmeriCorps member**  
VISTA program, UAMS Culinary Medicine Team



# FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE SPONSORS

## University of Alabama at Birmingham

 Birmingham, Alabama

The University of Alabama at Birmingham expanded their reach in the Birmingham metro area and Black Belt region. Members collaborated with community partners, farmers, food banks, and other community resources to identify funding opportunities; developed marketing materials and conducted outreach activities to promote food resources; and increased University of Alabama at Birmingham's ability to serve food insecure populations by recruiting and managing volunteers.

### Project Highlights:

Members collaborated with community partners, farmers, food banks, and other community resources to identify funding opportunities, develop marketing materials, and conduct outreach activities to promote food resources. In 2023, members achieved:

- **9,082** volunteers recruited or managed
- **29,082** total volunteer hours
- **1,091,019** individuals served
- **4,031,203** pounds of food provided
- **\$630,599** total funds leveraged



*"I was able to serve at a crucial time in global history the coronavirus pandemic and prepare and distribute food to kids and their families. I feel very proud of my service."*



**AmeriCorps member, VISTA program**

*"[My AmeriCorps service] defined the way that I think about food, food systems, food waste, and food insecurity."*



**AmeriCorps member, VISTA program**

### Conclusion:

The initiative brought more resources to sponsors in a time of great need during the COVID 19 pandemic. The influx of resources helped serve diverse communities and organizations with a wide range of different approaches to food security.

When surveyed, the majority of sponsors reported being part of the initiative helped increase their organizational capacity to support their efforts towards food security. Sponsors also reported they felt like they belonged to a community and that they planned to incorporate the research techniques they learned. Sponsors increased awareness of the breadth of AmeriCorps VISTA's capabilities, by learning about the work their co participants do in their respective communities.

The initiative furthered the mission of the AmeriCorps VISTA program by building out its capacity and identifying lessons learned for implementing and managing a Learning Community.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The Food Security Initiative was a collaborative effort. The initiative spanned two presidential administrations and responded to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated the need for food access and AmeriCorps' community of members, staff, and sponsors rose to meet the need.

AmeriCorps VISTA is grateful for the work and impact of our community. We would like to thank:

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- AmeriCorps Office of Communication & Marketing
- AmeriCorps Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, in particular **Stedmond Ware**
- Our partners at USDA and the White House Domestic Policy Council

**Most importantly, thank you to our Food Security Initiative sponsors and members for their participation, time, and continued commitment to providing food access for all. Thank you for being champions of the AmeriCorps VISTA program.**

