

# Volunteer Iowa

(Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service)

## State Service Plan 2023-2025:

*A Blueprint for Building on Iowa's Ethic of Service*

**Our Mission:** To improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

**Our Vision:** To create an Iowa where all citizens are empowered through service to meet community challenges and make lives better.



*The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service will use our resources and partnerships to fulfill strategies outlined in this plan. The plan includes: 1) Developing New Service Opportunities; 2) Improving Existing Services & Programs; 3) Building a Culture & Climate for Service; 4) Expanding Iowa's Volunteer Base; and 5) Building Iowa's Volunteer Infrastructure.*

***Our Principles & Values for the Current Plan:*** Volunteer service is a force multiplier for Iowans to forge local solutions to local problems. The following principles define how Volunteer Iowa works across these issues and across the State.

**Partnership**

In our work, Volunteer Iowa strives to support and not control the community partners that make things work. Locally, regionally and statewide, Volunteer Iowa will support connections, develop relationships and build the capacity of organizations to collaborate to get things done.

**Promotion**

Research tells us that people volunteer because they are asked to, particularly by someone they know or admire. We don't need studies to show that Iowans are proud of their commitment to our state and each other. Volunteer Iowa is uniquely positioned to create, promote and connect people, and ensure that every Iowan can find an impactful way to volunteer.

**Equity and Inclusion**

There is no problem that faces Iowa that Iowans cannot solve. People are the experts on what's needed in their own communities. But to do so requires that everyone has a seat at the table and a voice that is loud and clear. Our history as a welcoming place and our booming economy provides a great platform to work together for all Iowans. Volunteer Iowa seeks to increase equity and inclusion across our portfolio of programs and services.

**Capacity**

Through the Service Enterprise Initiative, programming and trainings, Volunteer Iowa is a national leader in strengthening partner organizations. Building up organizations is only half of the equation. We must get out of their way. Reducing the administrative burden on our grantees increases their ability to serve. One of the ways we can do the most good is to protect the taxpayer dollars under our care, while making it easier for local groups to access and use them well.

These are the values that direct Volunteer Iowa and our work to improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

## ***Guide to Reading the State Service Plan***

### **How we carry out our mission**

The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (ICVS or Volunteer Iowa) and our partner agencies work with organizations and individuals on three main fronts. The first is to help agencies *develop* quality programs that use service as a strategy to fulfill their missions and address Iowa’s greatest areas of need. The second is to help *engage* Iowans in their communities by promoting a culture of service and expanding the volunteer base. Finally, the third area of work is to *connect* individuals with appropriate service opportunities by building the volunteer infrastructure.

### **Rationale for the vision statement**

Volunteer Iowa embraces service and volunteering as resources that build community. Whether service contributes to the area’s people, natural environment, culture, physical infrastructure, financial status, or political systems, increasing the quantity and improving the quality of service provided makes communities better. In this way, service directly improves *ecological, human, and economic capital*. And service, no matter its result, inherently builds *social capital*, the connections between and among networks in a community, through the relationships people develop while volunteering. A healthy community is one that has high levels of social, ecological, human and economic capital, the combination of which may be thought of as *community capital*. Service benefits all aspects of community capital, making Iowa a better place.

### **How the State Service Plan is used to direct the work of Volunteer Iowa**

Iowa’s State Service Plan serves as a blueprint for maximizing civic engagement and service in Iowa. Like a blueprint for a dream house, this plan outlines what we want for service in Iowa and needs to be done, over time, to get there. We may not implement all components of the plan during the next three years, as the speed of our progress is conditional on external forces, and Volunteer Iowa is only directly responsible for some of the work. However, we will prioritize and act on elements that are most achievable and ask our partners to do the same.

The State Service Plan will evolve over time as we aim to benefit the areas of Iowa that have not only a demonstrable need but also a strong chance for success. In our efforts, Volunteer Iowa will seek to support comprehensive community strategies in areas where stakeholders have already come together to address an issue, such as by using the principles of collective impact or other place-based strategies. We hope that this approach and the plan, in general, will be used by our partners in the service community as together we work to make Iowa a better place to live and the most civically engaged state in the nation. Each section of the plan contains priorities or objectives, which describe what Volunteer Iowa hopes will be accomplished, as well as strategies and tactics, which offer methods for realizing our priorities and objectives.

*Volunteer Iowa proudly serves all people without discrimination on the basis of age, color, creed, gender identity or expression, marital or parental status, mental or physical disability, military service, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law.*

## **Service Development: Demand for Volunteers**

### 1) Developing New Service Opportunities – Working with Organizations and Communities to Use Service as a Strategy

One of the primary functions of Volunteer Iowa is to work with organizations and communities to help them use service as a strategy to fulfill their missions by engaging Iowans in addressing pressing community challenges. We do this by connecting those agencies in need with programming that we or our partners fund, or by providing technical assistance on how to better utilize community volunteers to fulfill that need. The introduction of new programming at the state and federal levels, along with the flexibility to utilize other funding streams to support service programs, combine to make new program development a vital piece of Iowa’s State Service Plan.

We know that engaging in any type of volunteering can improve the life of the recipient and can strengthen a community by building a bond between the community and its residents. These fortified ties can help communities retain residents who will improve their community. But we also know that when volunteers perceive their service is helping to make a difference towards real problems, they are also more likely to be highly engaged in their communities. So, as we work to support new program development, we are guided by the mission of Volunteer Iowa, directing us to use service to “improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement.” The bigger the need, and the more directly a volunteer experience is addressing the need, the more likely people will be willing to help. Accordingly, we want to help organizations develop programs that use volunteers in meaningful ways to address substantial problems. Therefore, we will dedicate our resources to develop service opportunities targeting serious community problems in the state.

## **Developing New Service Opportunities Objectives**

- Work with communities and organizations to develop programs and service opportunities that are built on sustainable principles that engage all Iowans:
  - Programs that are part of or utilize a comprehensive community strategy
  - Programs or strategies that engage underrepresented populations and those that provide a high return on investment
  - Programs in geographic areas that are underserved or have the highest need
  - Programs that address disparities in rural communities or with minorities
  - Programs working to build community capital
- Work with and target communities and organizations to develop programs and service opportunities addressing stakeholder priority areas:
  - State legislative statutory focus areas
  - AmeriCorps federal agency focus areas
  - Governor’s priority areas including:
    - Improving water quality
    - Building capacity and sustainability towards programming addressing food insecurity
    - Improve access to affordable housing
    - Disaster mitigation and response
    - Engaging youth with targeted jobs like teaching, nursing or Future Ready Iowa identified careers, starting with K-12 through college developing career pathways
    - Childcare and enrichment
    - Education efforts targeting areas needed to get kids back on track from lost classroom time, especially math and reading.
    - Health programming addressing rural EMS and public health

## Targeted Strategies and Tactics for Developing New Service Opportunities

1. Partnerships
  - a. Support partners who strengthen student engagement and learning through expansion of Service-Learning opportunities both in school- and community-based settings.
  - b. Work with state agency and local governmental partners to develop Iowa National Service Corps programming.
  - c. Explore new program development with current partners, particularly to address gaps in services for key issue areas.
2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach
  - a. Through our grant making, grant guidelines, and performance measures, encourage the creation of programs that align with Volunteer Iowa priorities.
  - b. Support legislative efforts to increase funding and resources to Iowa organizations that utilize volunteers and national service members in order to accomplish their charitable missions more efficiently and effectively.\*
3. Equity and Inclusion
  - a. Implement targeted rural and urban programming to support capacity and leadership development with members representing the communities they serve.
  - b. Explore replication opportunities for programming that addresses and works to mitigate disproportionate outcomes with regard to school discipline, foster care, juvenile justice, corrections, and similar systems.
  - c. Through the Iowa Mentoring Partnership, work to develop new mentoring programs to ensure all young Iowans have access to a caring adult; use mentoring as a strategy to improve outcomes for Iowa youth in educational achievement, drug prevention and avoiding juvenile justice involvement; and use mentoring to improve college access and success as outlined in the Future Ready Iowa Mentoring Program.
4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
  - a. Build rural community capacity for programming by focusing on community assets and providing flexibility in requirements. Focus on individual communities with a comprehensive approach to program development.
  - b. Address funding and bureaucratic obstacles that prevent smaller organizations from hosting AmeriCorps and other national service members or programs.
  - c. Change existing laws and regulations to make it easier for state service commissions to directly operate national service programs or complete programmatic functions. Explore other policy changes that will encourage more organizations to participate in Volunteer Iowa programs by reducing their risk and liability.
  - d. Work to increase community, school and charitable childcare and child enrichment programming, including exploring wrap-around preschool programming.
  - e. Enhance offering for senior programming through AmeriCorps Seniors including pilot intermediary program development with new sites and partners.
  - f. Spur the development of new national service and volunteer positions through initiatives identified by the Governor's Council on National Service, including:
    - i. Iowa National Service Corps

- ii. Work with state agencies to integrate service-based solutions, volunteer recruitment, and improved volunteer management into state programming.\*
- iii. Use Service Enterprise framework to work with nonprofit organizations to develop more technical, skills-based, and pro-bono volunteer opportunities. Partner with funders, both public and private, to give community organizations incentives to utilize volunteers effectively through Service Enterprise or other capacity-building efforts.

## **Service Development: Demand for Volunteers**

### ***2) Improving Existing Services & Programs – Developing Quality National Service and Volunteer Experiences and Programs through Training, Technical Assistance, and Monitoring***

We believe that when developing opportunities to volunteer, we need not ask whether it is more important to create additional opportunities or better opportunities. It is necessary to do both, and the data are clear that the best way to generate more service—whether it be a greater number of volunteers, national service opportunities, or service programs—is to improve the quality of the service. Effective programs have higher retention rates, and with 37.5% of traditional volunteers and more than 15% of national service participants discontinuing their service annually, increasing retention rates through improved screening, placement and volunteer management is one of the most efficient ways to increase volunteerism. In addition, funding for the expansion of service programming is often awarded on a competitive basis, in which quality and efficacy in addressing a need are key factors in determining who is selected. Increasing program quality will bring more funding, and lead to more volunteers, national service participants and service opportunities in Iowa.

#### **Improving Existing Services and Programs Objectives**

- Improve organizational capacity and program impact
- Strengthen national service and volunteer programs and provide better experiences for those serving
- Improve sustainability of national service and volunteer programs
- Improve efficacy and coordination of volunteer response to disasters

#### **Targeted Strategies and Tactics for Improving Existing Services and Programs**

1. Partnerships
  - a. Connect or group together volunteer or national service programs, and the program participants, to help replicate successes:
    - i. Encourage regional or community-based collaboration on regional or community-based service goals.
    - ii. Provide tools and strategies for programs operating in the same community to partner with each other.
    - iii. Maintain online platforms for service programs to share best practices and successes and house an online library of resources and training.
    - iv. Provide resources and offerings for AmeriCorps member development in career and skill pathways.
    - v. Provide training more efficiently through national and regional partnerships with other states and within Iowa among organizations with similar goals or on topics that will help advance all types of organizations.
  - b. Educate foundations and funders about the return on investment for volunteer engagement and Service Enterprise to prioritize funding and expand funding sources for certified Service Enterprises.
  - c. Conduct outreach to each county’s emergency manager to assess or survey volunteer assets and needs.
- d. Continue to build partnerships with colleges and universities to train and engage students in disaster response.

- e. Increase the number of mentoring programs engaging in the National Quality Mentoring System through the Iowa Mentoring Partnership (IMP)
  - f. Strengthen the State of Iowa Volunteer and Donations Management Annex and the support provided to bolster county plans for managing spontaneous volunteers in times of disaster
2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach
- a. Promote safety and accountability in volunteer and national service programs through the following means:
    - i. Update, disseminate and provide training on the “Safer Practices for Screening and Selecting Volunteers to Serve Vulnerable Persons in Iowa” and National Service Criminal History Check guidance so that organizations can effectively mitigate risk.
    - ii. Support cost-effective strategies for national service programs to screen program participants and other covered individuals, such as sharing allowable information about background checks already conducted for professional/licensed staff.
    - iii. Revisit the possibility of a state criminal history check clearinghouse.
  - b. Maintain funding levels for Volunteer Iowa to operate at our full capacity to improve services and programs.
  - c. Analyze, collect (or support collection of), and disseminate data relevant to Iowa’s service community, including the annual *Volunteering and Civic Life in America* report, the Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey, and other state and national reports, to monitor successes and identify opportunities.
  - d. Reduce administrative burden to grantees from Volunteer Iowa’s internal policies
3. Equity and Inclusion
- a. Convene representatives of programs and community champions to discuss programming and recruitment efforts done *with* the target population, and not *to* or *for* it.
  - b. Encourage existing programs to become more culturally competent through training and technical assistance.
  - c. Continue tracking engagement in service and volunteerism by various demographic groups, in order to monitor progress on equitable engagement of Iowans assisting all types of Iowa communities.
4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
- a. Work with grantees to identify inefficiencies and redundancies in processes (theirs and ours) that can be rectified.
  - b. Develop strategies to help mitigate federal funding and bureaucratic challenges for national service programs.
  - c. Support implementation of effective volunteer management practices:
    - i. Work with Iowa nonprofits to become certified Service Enterprises—organizations that fundamentally leverage volunteers and their skills to



- successfully deliver on the mission of the organization to be more effective.
- ii. Support local groups and associations for volunteer engagement professionals to increase networking, professional development, and best practice sharing.
  - iii. Expand the number of organizations providing local technical assistance and training to volunteer managers through volunteer center development, partnerships with institutions of higher learning and inclusion in nonprofit management trainings.
  - iv. Provide a statewide network of learning and support for volunteer managers and service programs through continued support of the Iowa Nonprofit Summit, program-specific training, and improved web-based trainings and resources.
- d. Promote and train on use of centralized payroll services and other efficiencies.
  - e. Build local capacity for disaster preparedness and response, through methods such as:
    - i. Provide assistance to emergency managers in developing their response plans.
    - ii. Educate voluntary organizations active in disaster about utilizing the Get Connected system to recruit and manage volunteers in disaster.
    - iii. Train national service program directors, interested volunteer managers, local designated voluntary organizations and AmeriCorps members in disaster preparedness and response, especially the management of spontaneous volunteers.
  - f. Ensure that supported programs are of high quality, meet community needs and achieve results through:
    - i. Volunteer Iowa certification (Iowa Mentoring Partnership and the National Quality Mentoring System, Service Enterprise, Iowa National Service Corps etc.).
    - ii. Program assessment, progress reporting, and evaluation.
    - iii. Improved program quality assessment tools.
    - iv. Enhanced training and technical assistance to build organizations' capacity to measure and evaluate program impact.
    - v. Solid program management enforced through the monitoring and oversight of programs administered by Volunteer Iowa.
    - vi. Incorporation of effective volunteer management practices into our existing programs.
  - g. Maintain an active Programs committee at the Commission level to identify program improvement practices and trends and to direct Volunteer Iowa's program support and monitoring work.

## Engagement in Service: Supply of Volunteers

### **3) Building a Culture & Climate of Service – Volunteer Promotion & Recognition**

Like most behaviors, service and volunteerism are learned behaviors influenced by cultural norms and expectations. Although volunteer service is an activity undertaken by people from all different backgrounds, those who don't currently volunteer can have a hard time envisioning themselves as volunteers. Continued outreach can encourage those individuals to become engaged by sending a message that everyone can and should get involved in their community.

Individuals and agencies also report other barriers—both real and perceived—that prevent them from sharing or expanding their service. When there are true barriers preventing service, Volunteer Iowa will work with partners to remove these barriers and create an environment that promotes service. To address perceived barriers, Volunteer Iowa will demonstrate that there are service and volunteer roles for all Iowans.

These first steps help to engage volunteers in meaningful service opportunities. Then, if those volunteers feel valued and are properly recognized, not only are they more likely to continue to volunteer, but their friends and family are also more likely to be engaged in service opportunities. Therefore, our strategies will involve people in service early in life, expand opportunities to recognize volunteers, build a cultural expectation of service and community engagement, and prevent and eliminate obstacles to service and volunteering.

#### **Objectives in Building a Culture & Climate of Service**

- Create a cultural expectation for service where all Iowans feel a shared responsibility to serve the common good
- Appreciate and honor volunteers and volunteer programs, creating an environment in which others aspire to participate in volunteerism and service
- Induce state and local leaders to value and promote service, service opportunities, and quality volunteer management
- Foster a more positive climate for growth of service as a strategy, due to the removal of barriers and the creation of incentives for individual volunteers or organizations
- Overcome obstacles to service and engage more Iowans in their communities

#### **Targeted Strategies and Tactics for Building a Culture & Climate of Service**

1. Partnerships
  - a. Create tools for partners to promote volunteer and service opportunities.
  - b. Work with funders and partner organizations to appropriately value their volunteers and volunteer managers.
  - c. Support promotional initiatives of the Corporation for National and Community Service and other partners that would help support Iowa's efforts to build a culture of service.
  - d. Support employer and workplace volunteer recognition, including through the Give Back Iowa Challenge.
  - e. Encourage and support other local service recognition efforts.
  - f. Build relationships to connect elected officials and other policy makers to service programs in their area.
2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach
  - a. Enhance work with Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) to demonstrate how AmeriCorps

can aid community and economic development and be a pipeline of future leaders or employees.

- b. Promote the value of volunteering and the connection between volunteering and community development, health, employment, educational outcomes and overall economic resiliency.
  - c. Promote Iowa's culture of service and broader outreach campaign in support of service, with roles for commissioners and champions.
  - d. Promote the benefit of volunteering at an organization with effective volunteer management practices, such as a certified Service Enterprise.
  - e. Support and continuously improve statewide volunteer recognition for outstanding individual volunteers, volunteer groups, volunteer management leaders, and quality volunteer programs.
  - f. Provide platforms for organizations and individuals to highlight their service accomplishments, such as by reporting volunteer hours and sharing great stories that we can highlight with media partners.
  - g. Identify and utilize champions to encourage participation in service and volunteering.
  - h. Promote youth volunteering to instill the ethic of service in youth and ensure that Iowa's laws support youth volunteer and engagement efforts.
  - i. Maintain an active Policy committee made up of program level entities and commissioners to identify policy concerns and advocate for the removal of barriers to program development and success and to educate policy makers (local, state and federal) about the value of service. Maintain an active Engagement and Infrastructure committee at the Commission level to assess promotional opportunities and direct Volunteer Iowa's work in service infrastructure creation and support.
  - j. Add policies to capitalize on opportunities for remote workers (fire, EMS, local efforts that may have been barriers in commuter culture).
3. Equity and Inclusion
- a. Continue National Service Emergency Fund to solicit outside dollars to make sure those serving are not derailed by unforeseen circumstances.
  - b. Demonstrate diverse faces of volunteerism and service through Volunteer Iowa marketing and publicity. Promote service by underrepresented individuals in various volunteer sectors.
  - c. Make volunteering and national service a viable option for all Iowans by improving benefits and reducing financial barriers, such as through tax incentives, student debt reduction, and more direct pathways from service to employment.
4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
- a. Change existing laws and regulations to make it easier for state service commissions to directly operate national service programs or complete programmatic functions.
  - b. Implement policy changes that will encourage more organizations to participate in Volunteer Iowa programs by reducing their risk and liability.

- c. Educate public sector, national service, and nonprofit leaders about the value of effective volunteer/member management and of professional volunteer managers (particularly through Service Enterprise certification) as a way to cultivate a more welcoming service environment for all types of volunteers.
- d. Continue to advocate for reducing bureaucratic barriers and increasing access to funding at the federal level.
- e. Provide and facilitate sharing of resources for local government, small and mid-sized businesses and other employers to create programs that encourage employees to volunteer, including through the Give Back Iowa Challenge.
- f. Develop a culture of service in youth to create a lifetime of volunteering by building the capacity of schools to develop Silver Cord and similar programs.

## **Engagement in Service: Supply of Volunteers**

People are more likely to volunteer if they are asked, and much more likely to volunteer if a trusted source or friend is the one who asks them. This means we not only need to ask Iowans to serve, but we also need to increase and diversify our recruiters and connect with people closer to home. Therefore, as part of our plan to increase the supply of volunteers, we have outlined strategies that utilize more Iowans to invite people to serve.

Furthermore, Iowans are more likely to volunteer if they are invited to volunteer in places where they already congregate. Workplaces are a natural gathering point, yet less than 1.5% of volunteers are connected to their main volunteer opportunity through their employer. Research shows that workplace volunteerism benefits both the employee and the employer through increased recruitment, retention, engagement, and health of employees. COVID-19 took a toll on volunteerism in Iowa. Many longtime volunteers stopped that activity and many employers changed the nature of the workplace and thus also changed the nature of employment engagement strategies. We see a unique opportunity to engage more Iowans where they live and feel it is imperative to reengage volunteers in high demand areas.

Finally, we have listed specific strategies for volunteers whose engagement in service has dual benefit. For at-risk youth and Iowans with disabilities, service pays extra dividends by increasing future employment success and long-term wellbeing. Iowans over 55 years of age and students are populations in transitional periods of life—graduation or retirement—when they are most likely to leave the state. Service can offer an important remedy in our efforts to retain these college graduates and retirees. By engaging people in their communities through service, bonds can be created that graduation and retirement will not break.

### ***4.) Expanding Iowa's Volunteer Base — Volunteer and National Service Recruitment***

#### **Objectives in Expanding Iowa's Volunteer Base**

- Increase the number of Iowans who are asked to serve, whether in direct or indirect ways
- Recruit Iowans to help mentor the next generation of Iowans
- Mobilize more volunteers to address high need issue areas
- Diversify and better connect volunteer and national service programs with those who are underrepresented as volunteers or whose service provides maximum value, including:
  - Iowans age 55+,
  - disconnected youth,
  - students,
  - Iowans with disabilities,
  - minorities,
  - rural residents.
- Expand employment-based service opportunities and the number of employers that promote and engage employees in volunteerism

#### **Targeted Strategies and Tactics for Expanding Iowa's Volunteer Base**

1. Partnerships
  - a. Support local AmeriCorps alumni and members to take a role in national service recruitment.
  - b. Reinstate employer volunteer council, work with employers, large and small (including the State of Iowa), on identifying strategies for engaging employees at all skill levels in volunteering, especially those nearing retirement.
  - c. Expand the number of college students volunteering and pursuing national service following graduation through our partnership with Iowa Campus Compact.
  - d. Work with Iowa Campus Compact to assess and build additional college partners.
2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach
  - a. Market the opportunity value of service.

- b. Look at replicating efforts to engage members/alums as brand ambassadors to recruit other members/volunteers.
  - c. Target demographic populations that decreased service during COVID-19 pandemic and look to reignite their engagement.
  - d. Work to get more individuals to preregister as a disaster volunteer.
  - e. Promote a gap year in a way that can reduce student debt, improve our state and country, and help them explore career pathways while building community ties that may help retain more college educated Iowans and foster a culture of service.
  - f. Reach out to counselors and Silver Cord programs, colleges and professors to promote service and volunteering among students.
  - g. Empower host sites as promoters of AmeriCorps. Help them become our voices in new communities.
  - h. Measure national service participation. Consult the National Service Trust to determine which schools receive the most education award dollars and recognize colleges that have high number of students serving while promoting education value of service.
  - i. Develop and utilize a statewide volunteer recruitment marketing strategy for [Get Connected](#) (the Volunteer Iowa web-based volunteer portal).
  - j. Utilize social media to ask Iowans to serve through data driven recruitment campaigns and to encourage those that serve to share stories about their service.
  - k. Encourage local champions (such as CEOs, school principals, mayors, Governor, clergy) to call on Iowans to serve.
  - l. Enhance and market volunteer opportunities available to Iowans where they congregate, including places of employment, churches, community centers, and nonprofits.
  - m. Promote the empowering benefit of service to Iowans with disabilities and disconnected youth.
  - n. Share best practices in local volunteer recruitment and engagement like social media efforts, platforms, tools or other ways to expand our base.
3. Equity and Inclusion
- a. Maintain a committee around diversity and inclusion composed of program representatives and commissioners to both diversify the partnerships that Volunteer Iowa has across the state and ensure that we are helping foster a welcoming environment for all Iowans to serve and broaden our volunteer and national service base including helping to implement other strategies listed in this section.
  - b. Look into recruiting more nontraditional volunteers and members, particularly seniors, people in rural communities and people in communities not commonly served.
  - c. Maintain a national service leadership council to understand what resonates with them, and how to best express to students and parents the benefits of national service.
  - d. Develop strategies to engage new populations of volunteers, including, but not limited to, the subgroups highlighted in listening sessions (men, Gen Z, minorities, etc.).

- e. Promote and train organizations and programs to better engage volunteers who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities they serve.
  - f. Partner with organizations serving targeted demographic groups to help engage those populations in volunteering and target or incentivize participation in Service Enterprise by such organizations.
  - g. Incentivize and promote programs to engage more disconnected youth in service and volunteerism.
  - h. Explore viability of maintaining National Service Challenge fellowship or other Volunteer Iowa position to examine recruitment and retention best practices for diverse volunteers.
4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
- a. Launch state employee volunteering policy.
  - b. Increase Volunteer Iowa's outreach and assistance to employers, such as through the Get Connected campaign and by advocating for employers to provide volunteer time off.
  - c. Train programs and local partners on recruitment. Share what works and how to engage and sell community needs.

## **Connection of Volunteer Supply and Demand**

### ***5) Building Iowa's Volunteer Infrastructure***

A healthy volunteer infrastructure is key for ensuring that all other components of service and volunteerism work together. Research from the United Nations on volunteering worldwide shows that, while specific ways volunteering is implemented may differ from place to place, a healthy volunteer infrastructure will always make volunteerism a better and more impactful community resource.

We also know that people are more likely to volunteer if they have choices and if it is easy for them to find out how they can help; this is especially true in times of disaster. Improving technology and our online volunteer infrastructure can better facilitate this connection. We outline strategies that will strengthen Iowa's volunteer infrastructure to provide a shared understanding of volunteerism and its value. A healthy volunteer infrastructure creates an environment in which diverse best practices are shared and the full potential of volunteers is realized.

Additionally, we recognize that while infrastructure can play a key role in volunteerism, it also can play a key role in national service. We have long believed in the power of intermediaries to help streamline the delivery of national service and our program development strategy has reflected that. We have explored creation of an affiliated nonprofit in the past to help with backend and national service delivery but with implementation of Iowa National Service Corps legislation and seeing success of similar models in other states, we feel some areas of our work could have better growth and make it easier for Iowa communities to benefit if we had a nonprofit service delivery partner. This plan includes exploration and possible development of such a partner to help us facilitate strategic growth in core areas.

## **Objectives in Building Iowa's Volunteer Infrastructure**

- Support place-based volunteer infrastructure and prioritize local infrastructure development in a new part of the state each year
- Build holistic regional/local partnerships, with a focus on selected communities
- Achieve effective statewide coverage by volunteer centers or volunteer connector/capacity building organizations, including issue-specific or demographic-specific connector/capacity building organizations
- Expand the ability of communities to connect volunteers to needs during times of disaster
- Increase awareness of Volunteer Iowa and the resources it offers for building service infrastructure
- Increase the internal capacity of Volunteer Iowa to serve as an exemplary state service commission

## **Targeted Strategies and Tactics for Building Iowa's Volunteer Infrastructure**

1. Partnerships
  - a. Build upon regional collaborations and statewide partnerships, such as with the Healthiest State Initiative, Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council (IDHRC), Iowa Council of Foundations, United Ways of Iowa, Iowa Rural Development Council, and others.
  - b. Expand the areas of the state served by Volunteer Center services:
    - i. Strengthen partnerships with Volunteer Centers through continued participation in the Volunteer Centers of Iowa.
    - ii. Explore opportunities for non-traditional Volunteer Center designs through partnerships with other local organizations such as chambers of commerce, hospital volunteer offices, libraries, or faith communities.
  - c. Train and support a diverse network of volunteer connector organizations or other community-based entities to serve as regional or community-based Service Enterprise Hubs.



- d. Support local spontaneous disaster engagement plans and community and voluntary organizations active in disaster (COADs and VOADs).
  - e. Work with the Corporation for National and Community Service to allow RSVP to be used as a volunteer connector for people of all ages in areas that are unserved or underserved by other volunteer centers.\*
2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach
- a. Promote awareness of the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service and the service it provides.
  - b. Conduct outreach to fill gaps in the use of the Volunteer Iowa portal as a statewide online volunteer recruitment tool ([www.volunteeriowa.org](http://www.volunteeriowa.org)) to increase the number of participating agencies and available volunteer opportunities:
    - i. Encourage nontraditional partners like libraries or chambers of commerce to establish county- or community-based volunteer referral recruitment hubs.
    - ii. Encourage local communities to designate staff and/or an agency to administer a local version of the volunteer portal, which would feed information into the state system.
    - iii. Promote the benefits of the system for web-based volunteer management.
  - c. Make available best practices and resources on starting a volunteer center or volunteer connector organization.
  - d. Advocate for volunteer engagement as a profession and a critical strategy for organizational capacity building through the promotion of national programs and initiatives such as Service Enterprise and Certification in Volunteer Administration.
  - e. Work for continuity in Volunteer Iowa’s outreach and recruitment efforts through our internal staffing plan.
3. Equity and Inclusion
- a. Design training to help organizations develop an environment where volunteers of all backgrounds feel welcome and increase opportunities for those with various skills, experiences, and availability.
  - b. Analyze internal volunteer structure and practices for opportunities to engage new voices and perspectives on our work, beyond serving on the commission board.
  - c. Utilize partnership with National Service Challenge to maintain structure to support diverse culture of service in Iowa and engage all Iowans in volunteerism and service.
4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
- a. Target communities with existing strong infrastructure that already work closely with Volunteer Iowa, to increase development of local infrastructure to be an on the ground partner.
  - b. Support, strengthen, and sustain existing volunteer centers and other volunteer connector organizations.
  - c. Provide technical assistance to businesses serving as volunteer connectors, such as those establishing employee volunteer programs.

- d. Utilize research and best practices on community asset building to develop a more flexible rural volunteer connector model to expand coverage of volunteer infrastructure, including one that can be enhanced using the Volunteer Generation Fund.
- e. Work with cities and towns to engage volunteers in meeting community needs and to develop volunteer connecting services in unserved or underserved areas.
- f. Utilize mobilization and deployment strategies for disaster that will support Iowa's emergency volunteer infrastructure.
- g. Develop a mobilization plan for national service participants in Iowa that enables members, program directors and/or commission staff to respond to local, state or national disasters.
- h. Use the power of volunteers to help implement all facets of this plan and the operations of Volunteer Iowa as a Certified Service Enterprise organization.
- i. Explore development of statewide service intermediary nonprofit that could complement the work of Volunteer Iowa and target impact and growth in key focus areas.
- j. Explore and pilot strategies to support and build capacity of nontraditional organizations, such as those in refugee and immigrant communities, to effectively engage volunteers and enhance efforts to promote engagement.

## **Special Plan Expanding the Volunteer Base for Iowans Age 55+**

- A. Utilize targeted messaging and train existing programs on how best to recruit, utilize, and retain Iowa volunteers and service members age 55+.
- B. Partner with organizations currently serving Iowans 55+ to recruit and develop opportunities to serve, including through participation in Service Enterprise and new Senior Demonstration Program.
- C. Communicate to CNCS policy changes that could enable more organizations to utilize service members age 55+, such as expanding fixed-amount grant eligibility to less-than-full-time members and making it easier for programs to convert unfilled full-time positions to three-quarter-time positions and remove four term maximum for older national service participants to increase program utilization by older Iowans. Such changes would enable programs to better utilize the skills and social capital Iowans age 55+ have to meet community needs.
- D. Expand counties covered by AmeriCorps Seniors programs to increase volunteerism by individuals aged 55+ through continued partnership with the Iowa Department on Aging and local Area Agencies on Aging to demonstrate the value of connecting Iowans 55+ to local communities, from a skill level perspective and a retention perspective.
- E. Continue to conduct outreach to nonprofits, the Iowa Department of Education, other state agencies, and higher education institutions to develop a list of high need volunteer positions to better connect to 55+ volunteers, particularly those providing tutoring to youth and through new Senior Demonstration Program and RSVP.
- F. Work with higher education institutions on creative ways for those age 55+ to utilize national service education awards.
- G. Continue working with and provide recommendations to the Iowa Department on Aging to take specific action to better engage and provide outreach to mature Iowans in service and partner with Volunteer Iowa to better market service. Such actions should include how to better partner with businesses and employers to get individuals age 55+ in their communities while still in the workforce, through initiatives like Give Back Iowa and partnerships with local regional Area Agencies on Aging and organizations like AARP and other associations that market and promote service opportunities to older Iowans.
- H. Promote employer volunteer opportunities that help individuals transition into retirement.
- I. Promote and highlight research and current data demonstrating social impact of those age 55+ in the workforce and volunteer force including supporting the business case for volunteering with employers as well as the health benefits of volunteering for individuals, particularly those 55+, such as:
  - 1. Time sharing or flexible work schedules for Iowans 55+ to keep employees in the work force longer and spark more volunteer service among this demographic.
  - 2. Employer volunteer programs that include employees 55+, including making pro-bono connections for certain high need professions (information technology, marketing, accounting, legal etc.).

- J. Support meetings, training and funding opportunities for AmeriCorps Seniors programs.
- K. Evaluate and seek grant and fee-for-service resources for senior volunteer programs.
- L. Increase effective volunteer management practices at AmeriCorps Seniors host sites through training, technical assistance, and resource sharing.
- M. Encourage and recommend the use of volunteers age 55+ for civic engagement and multigenerational activities by making it a priority for new program development and in funding decisions for afterschool programs, mentoring, respite care and other service opportunities.
- N. Use national service in creative ways, such as prioritizing AmeriCorps program models that utilize members age 55+, using AmeriCorps VISTA resources to build capacity of AmeriCorps Seniors programs, or expanding the efforts of existing AmeriCorps Seniors programs via AmeriCorps State funding.

## **STATE SERVICE PLAN GOALS**

Goal 1: Growth in number of participants in AmeriCorps and Iowa National Service Corps.

Baseline:

Goal:

Goal 2: Increase total number of volunteers leveraged by Volunteer Iowa programs including increase of mentors, employee volunteers and 55+ volunteers annually.

Baseline:

Goal:

Goal 3: Maintain strong performance in percentage of program performance measures met.

Baseline:

Goal: