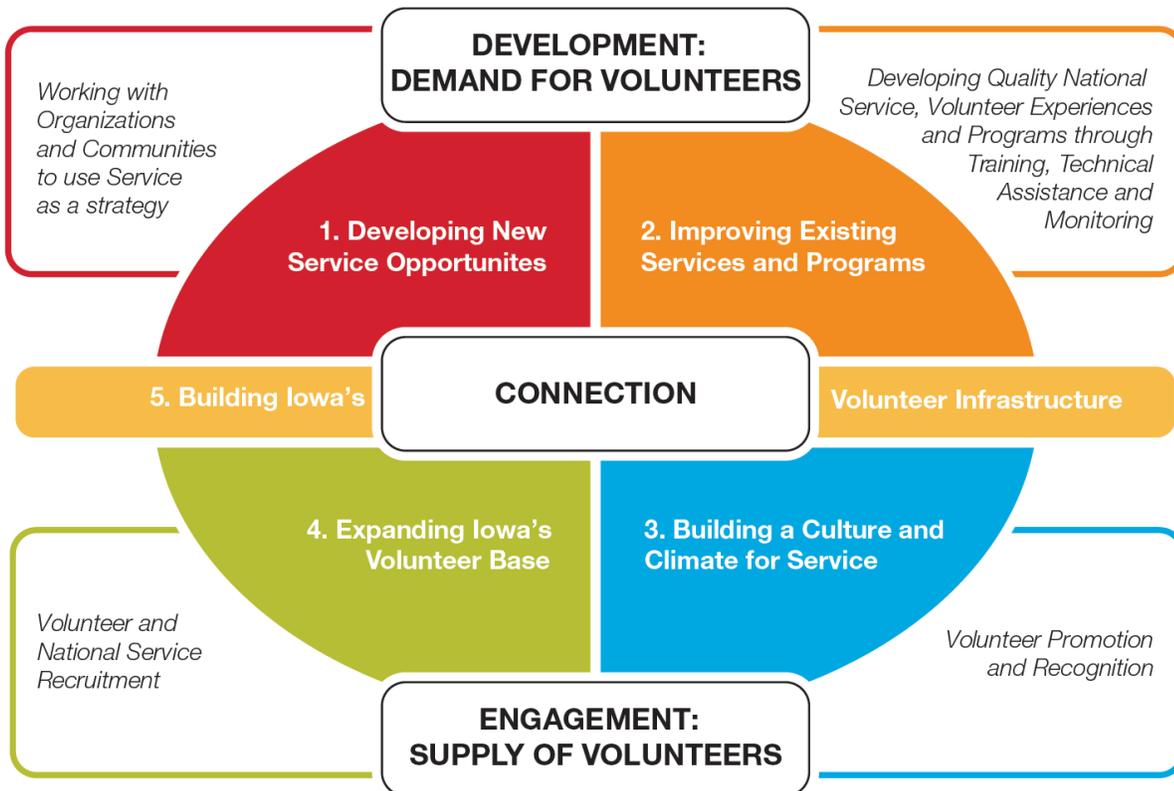


State Service Plan 2026-2028: A Blueprint for Building on Iowa's Ethic of Service

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.

Community Building

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. Iowa celebrates a history of being a welcoming place with strong communities that look out for our neighbors. We believe that empowering community-based solutions is the only way we will achieve the ownership to create long term solutions.

Capacity

Through Service Enterprise, 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.

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.

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 involve populations that are less engaged or provide a high return on investment for Iowa, such as youth and those approaching a life transition like graduation or retirement
 - Programs in geographic areas that are underserved or have the highest need
 - Programs working to build community capital
 - Programs that have a demonstrable record of efficacy
 - Develop programming and services that align with the Governor's priorities: *Iowans consistently step up for one another—service is part of who we are. Volunteer Iowa can build on this legacy by connecting people to meaningful opportunities that strengthen communities in ways government alone cannot.*
 - Connect Iowans to children in need to help them thrive through economic mobility volunteer opportunities
 - Expand Iowa's volunteer base to help Iowans during disaster responses and emergent needs
 - Strengthen Iowa's volunteer infrastructure for our feeding and meal partners
 - 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
 - Commission listening session identified priority areas including:
 - Transportation related programming and services
 - Out-of-school, summer, and youth enrichment programming to address Iowa's childcare shortage
 - Education efforts targeting areas needed to get students on track, especially math and reading
- Health programming addressing community health and wellbeing
 - Organizational capacity building

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.
- d. Work with partners and funders to scale programs that address state service priorities.
- e. Collaborate with existing networks providing services addressing priority issue areas such as transportation, out-of-school programming or mental health to strategically utilize service to enhance offerings.
- f. Work with partners, employers, higher education and workforce development entities to create service to career pathways.
- g. Partner with Iowa Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop a nonprofit accelerator to build capacity of nonprofits to increase the quality and scope of services and programming.

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.
- c. Work to enhance diversified funding streams for programming amongst federal, state, local and private sources to provide stability and growth.

3. Community Building

- 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 demonstrates innovation in service delivery and address priority areas.
- c. Through Iowa MENTOR, 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, pregnancy prevention, drug prevention and avoiding juvenile justice involvement.
- d. Look to build out-of-school time programming with youth service opportunities, service learning, mentoring, and learning enrichment programs, providing a “third space” for youth.

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.
- d. Explore other policy changes that will encourage more organizations to participate in Volunteer Iowa programs by reducing their risk and liability.
- e. Look for opportunities to help build program health through funder networks, endowments, or fee-for-service opportunities that support long-term operational revenue.
- f. Enhance offerings for senior programming through AmeriCorps Seniors that meet needs and provide valuable community services.
- g. 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 the Service Enterprise framework to work with nonprofit organizations to develop more technical, skills-based, and pro-bono volunteer opportunities.
 - iv. 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 26% of traditional volunteers and more than 14% 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.

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
- Strengthen data collection and use to better understand both the impact of service on participants and the outcomes of the service provided

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 accredited 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 service.
- e. Increase the number of mentoring programs engaging in the National Quality Mentoring System (NQMS) through Iowa MENTOR (also known as the Iowa Mentoring Partnership or 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 program policies and work with federal and private funders to streamline and simplify requirements and help facilitate more volunteer/member focused service opportunities.
3. Community Building
- a. Convene program representatives and community champions to share successes, coordinate recruitment efforts, and amplify overall impact.
 - b. Continue tracking engagement in service and volunteerism by various demographic groups in order to monitor progress and find opportunities to further community-wide engagement.
 - c. Support community collaboration and collective impact initiatives by strengthening coordination, providing enhanced resources, and improving system navigation.
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 accredited 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.
 - v. Support development of a nonprofit accelerator program to build local organizational capacity to help meet local needs.
 - d. Promote and train on the use of centralized payroll services and other efficiencies, such as fixed cost grants.

- 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 MENTOR 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.
 - vii. Utilization of a new nonprofit accelerator program through Iowa HHS.
 - viii. Develop high-impact, data-driven volunteer opportunities with the Iowa HHS Volunteer Office to enhance the services of Iowa's largest agency and provide a collaborative model for other state agencies.
- 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

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 engage 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.

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

Objectives

- 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, through 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. Implement State of Iowa Employee Volunteer Policy and Volunteer Time Off Policy with the Governor's Office and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS).
 - b. Work with the Governor's Office and DAS to better implement and promote utilization of Iowa Code allowing Iowa National Service Corps and AmeriCorps hiring preference by state and local governments and schools.
 - c. Create tools for partners to promote volunteer and service opportunities.
 - d. Work with funders and partner organizations to appropriately value their volunteers and volunteer engagement professionals.
 - e. Support promotional initiatives of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and other partners that would help support Iowa's efforts to build a culture of service.
 - f. Support employer and workplace volunteer recognition, including through the Give Back Iowa Challenge.
 - g. Encourage and support other local service recognition efforts.
 - h. Build relationships to connect elected officials and other policymakers to service programs in their area.
 - i. Work with cities and local governments to engage residents as active participants and volunteers in local government, creating buy-in, trust, social capital, and a pipeline for boards and commissions.
- h. Explore other partnerships, both public and private, to elevate and value Iowa's outstanding volunteers.

2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach

- a. Enhance collaboration with Iowa Health and Human Services (HHS) to demonstrate how AmeriCorps can be a pipeline for community health workers through the Iowa Community Corps AmeriCorps program and Youth Mental Health Corps. Continue to enhance work with Iowa HHS to demonstrate how AmeriCorps and volunteers can address other agency needs.
- 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 an accredited 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 can be highlighted with external partners and media.
- 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. Explore formal standardization or state level support of Silver Cord programs through shared tools and uniform policy with the Iowa Department of Education and Governor's Office.
- j. Maintain an ad hoc 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 Volunteer Engagement and Infrastructure committee at the Commission level to assess promotional opportunities and direct Volunteer Iowa's work in service infrastructure creation and support.
- k. Encourage employers to promote efforts that capitalize on opportunities for remote workers (fire, EMS, local efforts that may have been barriers in commuter culture).
- l. Explore utilization of in-state tuition benefits for Iowa National Service Corps and AmeriCorps members and Veterans to both attract and reward those that have served our country.

3. Community Building

- a. Continue National Service Emergency Fund to solicit outside dollars to ensure those serving are not derailed by unforeseen circumstances.
- b. Showcase people of all ages, experiences, and communities who serve through Volunteer Iowa marketing and publicity to help remove misconceptions that only certain types of people volunteer.
- 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.
- d. Develop strategies to recognize youth and other community volunteers to replace Presidential Volunteer Service Awards either through Governor's Volunteer Awards or other means for direct nomination and participation.

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 and member management and of volunteer engagement professionals (particularly through Service Enterprise accreditation) 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 flexibility 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.

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. 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

- 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
- Connect volunteer and national service programs with those who are at periods of life transitions, to build community bonds and encouraging them to stay in Iowa:
 - Iowans age 55+,
 - disconnected youth,
 - students,
 - 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. Involve 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 the Seed Coalition (formerly Iowa Campus Compact) and other programs and efforts.
 - d. Partner with schools and engage youth in helping deploy strategies to specifically market to younger volunteers.
 - e. Work with Career and Technical Education programs to build service to career opportunities.
2. Promotion, Policy, and Outreach
 - a. Improve and enhance marketing of volunteer opportunities as well as the opportunity value of participating in service itself.
 - b. Look at replicating efforts to engage members and alumni as brand ambassadors to recruit other members and volunteers.
 - c. Work to get more individuals to preregister as a disaster volunteer.

- d. Promote a gap year in a way that can reduce student debt, improve our state and country, and help explore career pathways while building community ties that may help retain more college educated Iowans and foster a culture of service.
- e. Reach out to counselors and Silver Cord programs, colleges and professors to promote service and volunteering among students.
- f. Empower host sites as promoters of AmeriCorps. Help them become our voices in new communities.
- g. 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 educational value of service.
- h. Promote utilization of Iowa's Get Connected website (Volunteer Iowa's web-based volunteer opportunity database) and www.volunteeriowa.org.
- i. 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.
- j. Encourage local champions (such as CEOs, school principals, mayors, Governor, clergy) to call on Iowans to serve.
- k. Enhance and market volunteer opportunities available to Iowans where they congregate, including places of employment, churches, community centers, and nonprofits.
- l. Promote the empowering benefit of service to all Iowans.
- m. Share best practices in local volunteer recruitment and engagement like social media efforts, platforms, tools or other ways, to expand our base.

3. Community Building

- a. Look into recruiting more nontraditional volunteers and members, particularly seniors, people in rural communities and people in communities not commonly served.
- b. Engage national service participants and young people directly to help inform the Commission's work, look at better utilization of ad hoc committee participation or other ways to solicit input.
- c. Develop strategies to engage new populations of volunteers.
- d. Partner with organizations serving targeted demographic groups to help engage those populations in volunteering and encourage their participation in Service Enterprise.
- e. Incentivize and promote programs to engage more disconnected youth in service and volunteerism.

4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
 - a. Work with DAS and IPERS to support and promote state employee and retiree volunteering.
 - 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, sharing what works and how to engage and advocate for community needs.

Connection of Volunteer Supply and Demand

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.

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.

and VOADs).

5) *Building Iowa's Volunteer Infrastructure*

Objectives

- 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, Iowa Nonprofit Alliance, 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, local Iowa HHS offices, libraries, or faith communities to be hubs for volunteer engagement and connection.
 - 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

- 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) to increase the number of participating agencies and available volunteer opportunities:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. 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. Strengthen implementation of the Iowa HHS Volunteer Office as an agency specific volunteer infrastructure and leverage it to make service a standard tool of delivery across all aspects of the agency, creating a model for other governmental agency partners.
 3. Community Building
 - a. Design training to help organizations develop an environment where volunteers from 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.
 4. Capacity, Quality, and Support
 - a. Support, strengthen, and sustain existing volunteer centers and other volunteer connector organizations.
 - b. Provide technical assistance to businesses serving as volunteer connectors, such as those establishing employee volunteer programs.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Work with cities and towns to engage volunteers in meeting community needs and to develop volunteer connecting services in unserved or underserved areas.
 - e. Utilize mobilization and deployment strategies for disaster that will support Iowa's emergency volunteer infrastructure.
 - f. 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.
 - g. Use the power of volunteers to help implement all facets of this plan and the operations of Volunteer Iowa as an accredited Service Enterprise organization.
 - h. Explore development of statewide service intermediary nonprofit that could complement the work of Volunteer Iowa and target impact and growth in key focus areas.

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.
- C. Communicate to CNCS policy changes that could enable more organizations to utilize service members age 55+ and refocus program outcomes back to the original intent, the benefits of participation on the participant. Such changes would enable programs to better utilize the skills and social capital Iowans age 55+ have to meet community needs while focusing on the impact it has on those serving. Suggested reforms include:
 - 1. Expanding fixed-amount grant eligibility to less-than-full-time members and making it easier for programs to convert unfilled full-time positions to part-time positions.
 - 2. Remove four term maximum for older national service participants to increase program utilization by older Iowans.
 - 3. Allow full transferability of education award.
 - 4. Create performance measures like reducing social isolation and increased physical activity of participants.
 - 5. Support research on longitudinal health benefits of service.
- D. Expand counties covered by AmeriCorps Seniors programs to increase volunteerism by individuals aged 55+ through continued partnership with the Iowa HHS Division 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. Targeted strategies and focus areas include:
 - 1. Combat social isolation
 - a. Prioritize engagement strategies to reduce isolation among older adults.
 - b. Explore using longitudinal data with AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers to measure impact.
 - 2. Improve rural access
 - a. Address transportation barriers in rural areas to enable volunteer participation.
 - b. Create volunteer opportunities for individuals with disabilities that can lead to employment.
 - c. Leverage the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) system for employer access and system-wide navigation.
 - d. Integrate new Senior Companion volunteers with nursing programs under the Iowa HHS initiative.
 - 3. Support through Medicaid redesign
 - a. Advocate for flexible service models that don't require full waivers to fill service gaps.
 - b. Focus on transitional support to help individuals move off long-term public benefits.
 - 4. Data-driven planning
 - a. Collect and analyze data to justify service needs—e.g., what services are most used under the elderly waiver.
 - b. Use findings to support strategies that prevent Medicaid dependency.
- 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 RSVP.

Support the development of low-commitment entry points to volunteering that create pathways to deeper volunteer involvement.

- F. Work with higher education institutions on creative ways for those age 55+ to utilize national service education awards (senior study abroad, digital literacy, etc.).
- G. Continue working with and provide recommendations to the Iowa HHS Division on Aging to take specific action to better engage and provide outreach to mature lowans 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 lowans.
- 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 lowans 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, trainings 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.