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Birmingham Service Corps

United States

A locally-implemented and federally-funded grassroots response to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis

Summary

Birmingham Corps began in response to the COVID-19 crisis. A central aspect of the program provided participants with paid service learning. Participants worked in roles including: Covid-19 screening, making school lunches to be distributed to children, and supporting testing sites. In 2022, the program expanded and became a part of CityCorps, a national effort supported and led by Baltimore Corps. Birmingham Corps was inspired by the program.

Rationale

COVID-19 crisis response program and the availability of foundation and public funds.

Defining Principles

Provide a safety net through professional development and social impact entrepreneurship. Their core values are: “Advancing equity & racial justice, Elevating & fortifying the social-impact sector,” (1).

Dates of Operation

2021 - present.

Number of Program Participants

300+

Criteria for Participation

High School graduate or GED recipient. 18 years old or older. Hold one of the following citizenship statuses: US citizen, US National, Lawful Permanent Resident Aliens. Pass a National Service Criminal History Check. Ability to serve 40 - 45 hours per week. These are the U.S. Americorps work requirements (2).

Pay and Benefits

Up to \$21,000 living allowance over 10 months (1700 hours), paid bi-weekly (3). Benefits: Medical & dental insurance; supplemental nutrition (SNAP)*; child-care stipend*; around 4,500 Segal Education Award for tuition; eligibility for student loan forbearance; 8 hours a week in professional development and career services to onramp you into your next high-quality career opportunity (4). *Subject to eligibility for programs



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Financing

U.S. Americorps and a mixture of additional public and philanthropic funds through non-profit entity Birmingham Corps. In 2020, a \$1 million investment came from the Birmingham Office of Economic Opportunity and Innovation along with two redeployed economic development incentive programs (5). A key funding source is the existing Americorps Vista program through Americorps Vista Alabama (\$576K for the 2022-2023 program, submitted for renewal annually) (6).

Implementation

Year long, full-time public service (“social impact”) employment program (“Capacity Builders”), which is combined with grantmaking and lending to “early-stage social entrepreneurs and Main Street businesses.” Program participants are provided with: race & equity trainings, leadership and professional skills workshops, networking events, community service projects, 40 hours per week of hands-on work experience.

Types of Work

Community services including Covid-19 screening, making school lunches to be distributed to children, supporting testing sites, and community health worker training. coordinating career counseling, pre-employment training and GED classes; coordinating mentoring, counseling, mental health, healthy food access and other wellbeing resources; coordinating child care services, transportation, high-speed internet access, and other safety net provisions critical to holistically supporting families and parents attempting to attach to work; developing programs to increase access to literacy interventions and exposure to STEM opportunities as a pathway to gainful employment (7).

Notable Features

Average age of those who have signed up is 32. Paid community volunteers.

Program Website

<https://birminghamcorps.org/>



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Citations

- (1) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program. https://www.canva.com/design/DAFM4h3yRbI/view?utm_content=DAFM4h3yRbI&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=embeds&utm_source=link
- (2) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.
- (3) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.
- (4) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.
- (5) Beahm, Anna. (April, 2020). \$1M Approved for Birmingham Strong Service Corps. <https://www.al.com/news/2020/04/1m-approved-for-birmingham-strong-service-corps.html>
- (6) AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps in Alabama. <https://www.servealabama.gov/state-ameri-corps>
- (7) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.



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