

SERVICE



Enhancing future prospects through foundational skills and competencies

Vibrant social connections and robust community involvement are part of what makes a strong America. Yet, among our nation’s young people, there are relatively low levels of community engagement. While acts of service that elementary schoolers take part in will look different than service among young adults, there is a way for all individuals, regardless of age, to engage in service, and individuals, regardless of age, can benefit from acts of service. For children and youth, service learning is an established method to bring youth closer to their communities while also promoting positive youth development outcomes. Among young adults, service, such as national service, enables them to make similar personal and professional gains when given the opportunity to participate. The afterschool field is a critical partner to expand access and availability of service in a multitude of forms for youth and young adults alike. Together with education and community leaders, afterschool and summer learning programs are working toward the healthy development of both the next generation and our democracy.

Overview

OregonASK, part of the 50 State Afterschool Network, is a statewide organization dedicated to advancing the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of expanded learning opportunities for children, youth, and families throughout Oregon. To help build the capacity of afterschool programs in communities of poverty, OregonASK engages young adults in a year of national service through an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance.

A typical day for AmeriCorps VISTA members

AmeriCorps VISTA members at OregonASK serve full-time in a yearlong position while receiving a modest living allowance that reflects the poverty level of the community they serve. VISTA members implement service projects based off a VISTA Assignment Description (VAD), a plan that outlines their key responsibilities and expectations. To achieve these project goals, OregonASK helps VISTA members create an individualized work plan to use as a framework to guide their service year. As community needs may evolve over the course of the year, service project plans leave room for creativity and innovation that builds on the strengths of each member.

OregonASK

Wilsonville, Ore.

Over 60 Average number of community partners:

2 Average number of AmeriCorps Members per year:

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Office of Early Learning – Child Care Division

Outcomes

VISTA members that served at OregonASK report gaining valuable transferable skills and competencies that have prepared them for their future careers. Experiences they cite as particularly formative include: facilitating meetings or trainings, collaborating with partners, learning how to use graphic design tools, and grant writing. Of the 13 VISTA members that OregonASK has hosted, the organization has hired six as full-time staff.

Program characteristics

Young adults who participate in a year of service at OregonASK lead projects that help strengthen the capacity of afterschool programs while engaging in a rewarding professional development experience. Over the course of eight years, OregonASK has supported four different VISTA projects (Sustainability, STEM, Health & Wellness, and My Brother's Keeper), each addressing an integral aspect of ensuring accessibility and availability of afterschool programming in Oregon's underserved communities. Past VISTA members have led projects such as the implementation of a statewide STEM survey to collect data on informal STEM learning opportunities and a collaboration with the Black Male Achievement initiative to coordinate a barbershop reading program that offers extended learning opportunities to young boys of color.

As VISTA members undertake capacity-building initiatives, they are taught how to assess community challenges in close cooperation with community members and stakeholders, and to use their critical thinking and leadership skills to generate community-driven solutions. OregonASK offers young adults a chance to prove themselves through this unique service experience, and supports them along the way as they build their work ethic and define their career interests.

AmeriCorps VISTA

[AmeriCorps VISTA](#) is a national service program that engages adults of all ages in meaningful service opportunities. VISTA members embark on capacity building endeavors such as fundraising, volunteer management, asset mapping, and community outreach in order to help lift people out of poverty. All AmeriCorps members live at the poverty level as they learn about and address critical community needs.

Afterschool programs support the growth of service opportunities for young adults by hosting both AmeriCorps State and National and AmeriCorps VISTA members at their sites. For example, State Afterschool Networks like OregonASK offer a variety of positive service year experiences for young adults.

Learn more about AmeriCorps VISTA and the VISTA programs sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance [here](#).



Challenges

Despite the positive impacts of service, the desire to be a positive force in the community is not translating into action.

Service opportunities at school: for some, not all. While trends show an increasing number of community involvement opportunities offered by schools and universities—for instance, 68 percent of principals reported that their students participate in community activities that are recognized by the schools, and 69 percent of college seniors participated in a service-learning course in 2018—too many individuals are not accessing these opportunities.

The type of service matters. A growing body of research shows the positive benefits associated with service. However, the majority of youth service opportunities are rooted in volunteering, rather than service learning, with the percentage of schools offering service learning declining from 32 percent in 1999 to 24 percent in 2008.

The equity divide. Participation in opportunities for service varies across different socio-economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, based on the availability and access to surrounding institutions that facilitate and encourage service. For example, schools in low-income areas, often serving a larger percentage of minority students, are less likely to offer service learning when compared with other schools. For low-income young adults, in school and in the workforce, monetary and non-monetary costs of service act as a barrier to participation.

Read [Afterschool Supports Service Opportunities from Youth to Young Adulthood](#) to learn more.

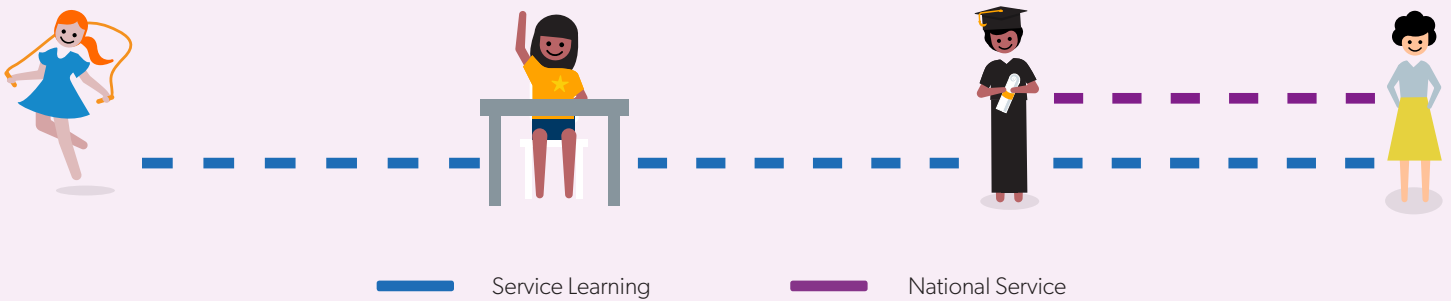
Service Opportunities at Every Age

Everyone, regardless of age, can take part in service. The service opportunity may look different depending on one's age, but the positive benefits are a constant. In addition to meeting the needs of a community, acts of service can foster greater community engagement, trust, a better understanding of the community, and compassion for others.

Service Learning

Through service learning, youth are active participants in thoughtfully organized community projects that advance a set of learning goals while meeting the needs of the community. For example, students in an afterschool program have environmental studies lessons where they study waste collection and recycling services in the city. Students then create and participate in a series of local cleanup projects as a way of applying what they've learned about accessibility and use of these services in various neighborhoods. The community benefits by receiving help with litter abatement and beautification efforts and informed recommendations on sustainable waste management.

Example adapted from [Loyola University](#).



National Service

For young adults, service can also be a deeper form of experiential education when participating in service programs designed to equip participants with the tools to assess and address community needs over an extended period of time. The Corporation for National and Community Service offers a number of national service projects that provide young adults hands-on opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills to help their community. For example, AmeriCorps State and National members placed at an afterschool program make a yearlong commitment to provide direct services to youth and their families. Members grow professionally by participating in orientation and trainings throughout the year to learn about the community they are serving and techniques to support student success. Students in afterschool programs benefit from the tutoring and mentoring relationships that AmeriCorps members provide. Afterschool programs also benefit by receiving help with child enrichment activities and overall program implementation.

Recognizing the valuable growth and development that accompanies a service year, OregonASK has hired several of their former VISTA members as full-time staff. One former VISTA member is now a Health and Wellness Coordinator and Trainer, who draws on her personal service experience as she coordinates training for an initiative called Service to Careers, a ten-week youth voice-led curriculum that guides middle schoolers through service-learning projects that help develop workforce skills.

Program history

OregonASK was founded in 2005 as a collaborative effort between public and private organizations and community members to build partnerships, develop policies, and provide resources in order to support and expand afterschool programs across the state. This mission began with a group of 18 partners, which has now grown to 60.

Recommendations

for enhancing future prospects through foundational skills and competencies:

- ▶ Identify individuals in your organization who are committed to devoting the time and attention needed in order to manage a service-learning program successfully.
- ▶ Keep in mind that youth and young adults do not develop skills and competencies overnight. Service-learning projects with a longer duration allow young people to gradually progress and come into their own.



Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org