TerraCorps Service Member Applicant FAQs for 1,200-hour Service Terms

[***Hint:*** If you want a leg up in your service site interviews, the first six (6) interview questions are embedded in the questions below.]

1) What is AmeriCorps and what is TerraCorps?

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteering, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. Learn more at Americorps.gov.

TerraCorps is a nonprofit organization working at the intersection of land conservation, sustainable farming, and local food systems to build local nonprofit capacity while growing the next generation of emerging leaders committed to making a difference at the community level. We value the power of local nonprofits to best understand and serve their communities. Our goal is to help them succeed by providing them access to the AmeriCorps national service model to build organizational capacity.

TerraCorps partners with a network of nonprofits in Massachusetts and Rhode Island focused on community needs related to local land conservation and sustainable agriculture. These partners act as service sites for a new cohort of AmeriCorps service members annually. Service members are paired with a site supervisor who provides guidance and mentorship while they learn to manage community programs and projects during their service term.

What this means for AmeriCorps/TerraCorps service members is that there is an opportunity to serve with one of many different environmental nonprofit organizations in southern New England. TerraCorps members serving at these organizations take on a variety of community projects, depending on the organization's mission, the coordinator position the member is serving in, the needs of the community, as well as the member's own interests, skills, and professional development goals.

2) What do TerraCorps members do at a service site?

Each member has a supervisor at their service site who will oversee their projects on a day-to-day basis. Members spend time in the first couple weeks of service developing a Service Plan outlining two main Capacity Building Projects. The goal for each Capacity Building Project is for members to increase their organization's capacity to serve their community. This might mean developing a new program, a new partnership or collaborative relationship, or expanding existing programs or partnerships. As members build capacity for their host organization, they also gain new skills and professional experience, expand their networks, and build towards their career goals. Developing the Service Plan with the site supervisor also gives members an opportunity to discuss and outline their professional development goals.

Capacity Building Projects are where the difference lies between TerraCorps and other AmeriCorps programs. TerraCorps members develop strong project management and leadership skills beyond what traditional academic, internship, or volunteer opportunities offer.

Members also can take on Direct Service Projects. Some goals for Direct Service Projects are to help the service site run existing programming; help with farm, land stewardship, or community engagement activities; assist with an event; and to actively participate in other opportunities to learn more about how their service site organization accomplishes their mission.

Each member must complete at least two Capacity Building Projects and may participate in as many Direct Service Projects as time allows and as assigned by the site supervisor.

3) What is TerraCorps' member application timeline?

We accept applications on a rolling basis beginning in October and aim to fill all positions by November 20. The sooner you submit your application, the higher the likelihood of interviewing for and being selected by your preferred service site organization and coordinator position.

If a service site is interested in bringing you in for an interview, you can expect them to be in touch within 1–2 weeks of your application. The process is competitive, and you may receive interview requests from multiple service sites. We request that you be efficient in scheduling your interviews and making decisions to accept or decline any offers.

4) How long is the TerraCorps service term?

This year's TerraCorps service term is December 7, 2026 – July 30, 2027. TerraCorps members commit to completing a minimum of 1,200 hours of service during the term. This averages to 38–40 hours per week.

5) **What do typical hours look like? Is there flexibility in the schedule? Can members serve on the weekends?**

At the beginning of the service year, members and supervisors will discuss a schedule. Many members serve a typical 9–5. Members should expect that their schedule may include serving in the evenings and/or on weekends. TerraCorps asks all service sites not to make evening or weekend part of a member's regular schedule, to consider the member's individual situation, and to offer schedule flexibility whenever possible. We also ask supervisors to allow their members to take a day off or come in late during regular weekdays if they have been required to work a night or weekend event. Pay close attention to a particular position's schedule in the Position Description and only apply if that schedule fits with your own personal needs.

Some TerraCorps members have been able to manage graduate school or a part-time job during their service term, which is permissible, if it doesn't interfere with their service hours or projects. While some members have done so successfully, it is important to understand that going to school or taking a part-time job can be very challenging for others. Be sure to discuss your plans to do so at your interview.

6) **Can I serve remotely?**

Full-time, in-person service is required. Remote or hybrid teleservice is prohibited unless approved in advance by TerraCorps as part of an accommodations plan.

7) **Can I take vacation or personal time? What about holidays?**

Yes, you can. Personal time off is factored into the calculation for average hours served during the service term. As you saw above and in the Position Description, AmeriCorps has an hours requirement. Members are expected to complete a minimum of 1,200 hours of service over the course of the service term. Service members completing 38–40 hours per week will be able to allocate some time off during the term. This includes holidays, personal or sick time, and vacation. Members who can complete higher weekly hours will be able to take additional time off. It is up to the member and the service site to work out a schedule that helps the member complete the required service hours but also offers some flexibility as needed.

8) **What is the compensation for service? Are there additional benefits to completing a TerraCorps service term?**

TerraCorps members receive:

- AmeriCorps living allowance paid biweekly over the term of service
- Segal Education Award upon successful completion of a service term (more information: Segal AmeriCorps Education Award Overview)
- Health insurance coverage (if eligible)
- Childcare benefits (if eligible)

- Forbearance of most federally guaranteed student loans, and payment of interest accrued during service
- Qualified eligibility for SNAP benefits in Rhode Island and SNAP/HIP benefits in Massachusetts
- Mentorship, training, and career development opportunities while serving directly with community-based nonprofits
- The personal rewards of national service and community engagement
- Lifelong connections to a growing network of people and organizations

9) Does TerraCorps provide housing?

TerraCorps is not a residential program and does not provide housing or a housing allowance for members. If you must relocate for a position, you will need to create a plan that allows you to be settled before the first day of Orientation.

We ask that all applicants consider the benefits listed above, along with their existing financial commitments, when planning for a TerraCorps service term. Living on a stipend can present unique challenges and we want to make sure that all members entering the TerraCorps program have considered them thoroughly.

10) What are the requirements to become a TerraCorps service member?

- Be a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or Lawful Permanent Resident Alien of the U.S.
- Be at least 17 years old
- Hold a minimum of a high school diploma or GED
- Have served no more than three previous terms as an AmeriCorps member
- Pass a criminal history background check, including an FBI check

11) If a service site has multiple positions, will I be considered for all of them?

The service site will decide which positions they want to consider an applicant for, based on the resume and other application information provided, such as the level of interest indicated for each coordinator position. Applicants may be invited to interview by service sites other than the ones they listed as their top preferences. Applicants are free to consider a service site or member position they might not have initially selected and may accept or decline an interview from any service site that offers one.

12) What skills are needed to be successful in these positions?

TerraCorps members come from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds. Here are the Top 3 factors that help members have a fulfilling and productive term:

- Strong communication and listening skills
- Ability to accept, apply, and give constructive feedback

- Ability (or willingness to learn) to manage time and multiple projects

Other characteristics that contribute to success in these AmeriCorps positions:

- Flexibility — being able to go with the flow when projects change, or things come up.
- Initiative — bringing ideas to different projects, asking proactive questions, etc.
- Organization skills — taking notes, email management, managing deadlines, etc.
- Openness to different perspectives — ability to engage in what can sometimes be difficult conversations with supervisors, colleagues, or community members whose ideas, values, or communication style may differ from the member's.
- Learner's posture — an understanding that all TerraCorps service sites are complex organizations with their own mission, values, and people with histories of doing good community work. TerraCorps believes in the power of local nonprofits to best understand and serve their communities and members who also embrace this philosophy during their service year are more successful.

13) All supervisors will include these six (6) questions in every interview they conduct with candidates. Please take some time to think about each question before your interview. Supervisors also will ask you other questions to get to know you better as an applicant and learn more about your interest, experience, and service preferences.

1. Why are you interested in serving with community-based, land-focused organizations like ours?
2. Serving as an AmeriCorps member is an opportunity to support a community while gaining leadership skills and professional experience. National Service is different than employment. What is your interest and motivation for serving in this unique role?
3. What interests you about this position (LCC, CEC, LSC, YEC, SAC)? You will be asked about the specific coordinator position you are interviewing for.
4. Where does this position fit into your career path?
5. When we invited you for an interview, we sent you a copy of the Position Description and the Advertisement. We're going to ask you about the Essential Responsibilities in the Position Description. Based on your review of those documents, describe how your skills and experience will help you succeed in performing at least 3 of the Essential Responsibilities described in the Position Description as they relate to specific projects listed in our Advertisement.
6. Talk about an experience managing a project. What was your process for identifying, prioritizing, and balancing multiple responsibilities?

Please hold on to these questions for any future supervisor interviews you may have with any of our service sites!

Also, supervisor interviews are a great time to ask any questions you have about each organization and the position you would be serving in if you were to accept a position with that partner site.

14) How likely is it that an applicant will be selected by one of their Top 3 service sites? How competitive is the program?

It's difficult to determine what an applicant's chances are of being selected by one of their preferred service sites because all final selection decisions are made by service sites, without input from TerraCorps. After your application is submitted, a service site supervisor will reach out to the applicants they are interested in to schedule interviews. Site supervisors decide who they will interview and to whom they make an offer. TerraCorps is a competitive program, but with a rolling application deadline, it depends on which applicants are in the pool at any given time during the application period. Positions are closed as candidates are selected. We recommend interested individuals submit application materials as soon as possible to be considered early by all site supervisors before offers are made and positions are filled. We also recommend that you accept interviews with service sites you may not have listed in your Top 3 since we work hard to ensure all TerraCorps service sites offer great service opportunities.

15) What kind of opportunities are there for professional development?

The TerraCorps service term starts with our Annual Orientation for members and supervisors. Orientation provides basic administrative information, such as filling out timesheets, tracking performance measures, writing monthly reports, and understanding AmeriCorps and TerraCorps service guidelines and expectations. During the service year, we have several training and service retreats, which offer a deeper dive into topics relevant to land conservation, communications, project management, volunteer management, community engagement, career success, and more. These retreats are mandatory events for all TerraCorps members, and in addition to training sessions, include a day of service in the community.

In addition to these TerraCorps-led opportunities for professional development, TerraCorps requires all our service site partners to allocate a set dollar amount towards each of their member's professional development. Members are encouraged to seek out and attend conferences, workshops, lectures, and webinars that are applicable to their individual service and career goals. All professional development time counts towards the required hours.

16) What are the opportunities to connect with other TerraCorps Members?

TerraCorps follows a scattered-site program model, which means members are serving with one of about 40 different partner organizations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Some organizations host more than one coordinator position, and this allows for two or more members to connect at the same service location. But there are other ways for members to connect with each other and the larger group. We have several all-corps events throughout the service year. The Annual Orientation is the first opportunity to meet other TerraCorps members. As mentioned above, there are several member retreats, which allow all members to come together for training and for community service.

TerraCorps also invites members to participate in member pods — groups of ~5 members based on their coordinator position and region. Pods meet monthly for social connection, to update each other on Capacity Building Projects, share ideas, and even planning and support on professional development. Member pods have traditionally met in person, but virtual meetings are another way to connect.

17) What kind of support is offered to TerraCorps members?

TerraCorps members receive free access to the AmeriCorps Member Assistance Program (MAP), which provides quality mental health, life coaching, medical advocacy, work/life resources, legal/financial resources, and more to AmeriCorps members. TerraCorps members can connect with MAP's licensed master's level counselors for confidential assistance 24/7 through mobile apps, telephone, and even face-to-face counseling.

TerraCorps members may be eligible for healthcare and childcare assistance if needed. Many members also may be eligible for food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP and formerly known as Food Stamps. Those who are eligible for SNAP also are eligible for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) in Massachusetts and the Farm Fresh Rhode Island Bonus Bucks program in Rhode Island, both of which support additional purchase of fresh, local food.

Members also are eligible for loan forbearance on qualified student loans, for which most federal student loans are eligible. Members who have private student loans should contact their loan service provider to find out about compatibility with AmeriCorps. Upon successful completion of a term of service, TerraCorps members also receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which can be used on existing student loans (most federal loans are eligible) or on future educational endeavors.

18) What do TerraCorps alums do after completing the service year?

TerraCorps alums follow varied paths. Every year, there are a handful of members who are invited by a service site for a second year of TerraCorps service. Some members receive job offers from their service site, either as contract/seasonal employees or as full-time staff members. Many alums head directly into a college degree program (or finish a degree program) after TerraCorps, whether an undergraduate, masters, or doctoral degree. Many alums join the job market, with most, but not all, seeking employment with organizations or companies in the land conservation or environmental sector.