



Title: Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps State Programs
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Summary

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) continues to award Georgia 4-H two AmeriCorps grants - AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and AmeriCorps State. Georgia 4-H is a unit of the University of Georgia (UGA) College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) Cooperative Extension. Georgia 4-H first received the VISTA grant in July 2010 and the AmeriCorps State grant in September 2012.

During the entirety of these programs, CNCS has funded more than 400 full-time AmeriCorps Member Service Years (MSY). MSY is the terminology used to describe a full-time member (similar to FTE). Both programs utilize a variety of member types (full-time, part-time, and summer-only positions). VISTAs and AmeriCorps State members (ACMs) have been a great benefit to Georgia 4-H while serving in county offices, 4-H Centers and in the State 4-H Office. The two programs are designed to increase the capacity of Georgia 4-H, with the ultimate goal of improving results for the beneficiaries of the organization.

Situation

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's 2021 Edition of the Top Ten Issues to Watch provides guidance for Georgia's leaders regarding challenges in public education and strategies to improve outcomes for students. The report highlights the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and the need for change so Georgia can move "from response to recovery and ultimately to success" (p. i). The report underscores the unequal, negative impacts of the pandemic across the state; the need for new approaches to learning and delivery of instruction; the opportunity to restructure accountability and assessment; the benefits of engaging parents as partners; and the call to reaffirm community collaboration.

4-H is the nation's largest youth leadership development organization, empowering nearly six million young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. Georgia is proud to be one of the largest state programs with more than 173,500 active participants. Georgia 4-H is one of only a few state 4-H programs that use in-school program delivery coupled with out of school activities. Georgia 4-H continues to be vital to the state's recovery efforts as evidenced by its existing partnerships with school systems, parents, and youth. Continued program delivery throughout the pandemic led to educational enrichment for young people. Continuous youth development efforts post COVID shut-downs was managed by Georgia 4-H staff, partners, AmeriCorps members, and volunteers to increase the statewide and local impact, edging youth enrollment numbers closer to the 2019 participation level.

Georgia 4-H provides research-based positive youth development (PYD) programming aligned with the Georgia Standards of Excellence to enrich local education efforts and improve life chances for youth, with a focus on improving educational attainment. PYD programming assists youth in acquiring knowledge, development of life skills, and forming attitudes that will help them become positive, caring, and contributing members of society.



According to the 4-H Thriving Model, long-term outcomes of 4-H participation include academic or vocational success, civic engagement, employability and economic stability, and happiness and wellbeing (Arnold, 2018).

Many of the youth served by Georgia 4-H's AmeriCorps programs live in poverty or have experienced poverty and come from homes with low educational attainment. Under the direction of Extension Agents, VISTAs develop resources to support Georgia 4-H programming while ACMs provide PYD programming directly to youth in support of the mission of Georgia 4-H. VISTA Summer Associates provide direct service for youth during eight weeks of summer on a focused national priority, relevant to the local program. The variety of programming and state-wide reach make Georgia 4-H an ideal organization to host AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps members are poised for making a dynamic impact on the students of Georgia.

Response

Traditionally a 3-year grant, Georgia 4-H applied for and received its 14th year of funding from AmeriCorps VISTA. VISTAs strive to eliminate poverty by building capacity within the 4-H program to reach marginalized and vulnerable youth via positive youth development experiences, reversing negative statistical trends. Through this process youth affected by the 4-H program will be more likely to graduate high school, not become pregnant during high school, attend postsecondary education, and become positive contributing citizens.

During the last 4-H program year, Georgia 4-H had one full-time VISTA member serving in the 4-H State Office, two full-time VISTA members completing their terms in Houston and Gwinnett Counties, and four VISTA Summer Associates serving youth through local county offices. The VISTA member serving at the Georgia 4-H State Office helped build capacity through volunteer development, curriculum creation, fundraising, marketing, 4-H Military program outreach, and more. During the summer months of 2023, four VISTA Summer Associates directly served in four counties, enhancing youth health habits, and supporting food security. Summer Associates served in Fulton, Habersham, Houston, and Peach counties to offer health programs for youth through cohorts called the 4-H Summer Health Squad.

All VISTA members attend an AmeriCorps VISTA Pre-Service Orientation (PSO). At PSO they received training in capacity building, community assessment, issues surrounding poverty in America, and UGA Extension and 4-H to prepare them for their role. They also participated in monthly webinars and seminars sponsored by both AmeriCorps and the University of Georgia on various topics related to their VISTA roles.

The goal of the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State Project is to support the mission of Georgia 4-H and increase the capacity of Georgia 4-H to better serve youth. Increased capacity refers to an increase in youth served, expansion of educational opportunities, and development of higher quality opportunities.

ACMs currently deliver 4-H programming to youth in grades 4-12 in 28 targeted counties in Georgia. These counties were identified based on need and the capacity to implement a high-quality AmeriCorps program. ACMs deliver a variety of 4-H programming, with an emphasis on two core programs: in-school educational club meetings and 4-H Project Achievement. These two programs were chosen as the primary focus because they are both consistently delivered by all



counties, are aligned with Georgia Standards of Excellence, introduce youth to areas of postsecondary study and potential career paths, and reach a diverse audience through in-school delivery.

ACMs and site supervisors attend a two-day New Service Year Orientation (NSYO). The training covers the following: grant regulations and reporting, member best practices, member retention, CPR/First Aid Certification, team building, and program delivery. The NSYO is implemented by the Program Director, Program Coordinator, and other staff and faculty members from the 4-H State

Office. Site supervisors orient members to their local community and train them to provide 4-H programming specific to the county need. ACMs also participate in twice a month webinars and are provided relevant trainings throughout their year-long term of service. District Team Leaders provide peer support to their fellow members and help build a sense of team spirit.

Currently in the twelfth year of the program, ACMs continue to provide direct service and address critical community needs in the areas of education, public safety, health, and the environment. Current counties in the project include the following: Banks, Barrow, Bleckley, Bryan, Bulloch, Candler, Carroll, Catoosa, Clayton, Cobb, Cook, Dougherty, Evans, Gordon, Hancock, Haralson, Houston, Laurens, Morgan, Murray, Oglethorpe, Paulding, Peach, Tattnall, Tift, Toombs, Whitfield, and Wilkes.

Impact

These programs have reached traditionally underserved clients, while increasing diversity in both Extension programs and leaders. Formerly, The Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State and VISTA team was honored as the recipient of the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Department Award for Diversity due to their diversity and inclusion efforts.

Since 2010 at its inception, 82 Georgia 4-H VISTAs (the FTE of 77) have raised more than \$739,200 in cash and in-kind resources, produced more than 4,150 marketing pieces, and recruited and/or coordinated more than 3,862 volunteers. In 2023, the State 4-H VISTA member contributed to the creation of four new resources to support 4-H programs including a 4-H Club Meeting Guide, a volunteer in-school meeting guide, a social-emotional learning camp reflection guide, and the adaption of the 4-H Army Babysitting Curriculum PowerPoint series, which have been submitted to the Extension publication system for sustainability.

The 4-H Summer Health Squads provided by VISTAs serving in Fulton, Habersham, Houston, and Peach counties reached 148 youth through its Summer Health Squads, which included six-hours of healthy habits curriculum. Through this programming, VISTA Summer Associates enabled youth to enhance knowledge of health, including learning about hand washing, mindfulness, and food security. In addition, these Associates enhanced local food delivery systems and supported the delivery of 3,095 pounds of food in June and July, reaching more than 1,300 individuals.

During the twelve years of the AmeriCorps State Grant, 241 full, 167 half-time, and two minimum-time members have served more than 462,901 hours, reached over 202,366 students through in-school programming, 147,614 students through 4-H Project Achievement, and recruited more than 2,404 volunteers that contributed 27,725 hours.



The AmeriCorps State grant has grown significantly since July 2012. The first three-year grant provided 16 MSY per year. The current program year we were awarded 24 MSY, with the largest per program year at 35 MSY. Georgia 4-H is the fourth largest AmeriCorps State program in Georgia, among 20 grant recipients. Our current total award is \$1,104,000 (\$552,000 in federal funds with a dollar-for-dollar match required). In addition to the \$5,080,578 in federal funds awarded since 2012, the AmeriCorps State grant has leveraged over \$1,291,692 additional funds (county, state, and private) to support implementation.

The Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State program consistently exceeds grant performance measures. A summary of the youth and volunteer related performance measures for the 2022-2023 program year is provided below. We are pleased to report that all outputs and outcomes were met.

As an organization, we continue to build up program participation that decreased due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This is reflected in the AmeriCorps State program as well.

4-H In-School Educational Club Meetings - A grand total of 17,210 students were served by ACMs in in-school educational club meetings. This exceeded our goal of 12,000. To measure content area learning, ACMs administered a total of 2,451 surveys to students after in-school educational club meetings. Of that sample set, 93% of students (2,269) showed an increase in and/or demonstrated knowledge of the content presented.

4-H Project Achievement - A grand total of 10,373 youth received instruction on the 4-H Project Achievement process from ACMs. This exceeded our goal of 9,500. Of the students that continued to compete at district-level Project Achievement, 963 completed a survey to measure mastery of best practices in public speaking and demonstration of or increase in confidence in public speaking. Of those students surveyed, 83% (804) demonstrated knowledge of best practices in public speaking or showed an increase in knowledge of best practices in public speaking and 84% (813) indicated confidence in public speaking or showed an increase in confidence in public speaking.

Volunteer Recruitment - ACMs recruited 223 new volunteers. This exceeded our goal of 115. These volunteers contributed 3,825 hours of service to Georgia 4-H.

A secondary goal of the AmeriCorps State grant is to provide meaningful experiences for ACMs, to prepare them for future employment, and to instill a sense of community service and civic engagement in members. At the end of the 2022-2023 program year, ACMs were surveyed regarding their overall satisfaction with the program.

- 88.89% strongly agreed and 11.11% agreed with the following - Through my service with the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps program, I have gained skills and experience that I can use in future employment.
- 55.56% strongly agreed and 38.89% agreed with the following - During my service with the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps program, I had opportunities to establish connections with other members and the broader National Service Network to build a sense of team spirit.
- 77.78% strongly agreed and 11.15% agreed with the following - As a result of my service with Georgia 4-H, I plan to continue volunteering and/or contributing to my community.
- 83.33% strongly agreed and 16.67% agreed with the following - As a result of my service with Georgia 4-H, I am better prepared for future employment.



Impact Statement
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This satisfaction with their service term along with the skills and experiences gained has resulted in many ACMs pursuing employment with Extension, specifically 4-H. Of the 256 distinct individuals that have served as an AmeriCorps State member (many serve multiple years), 22% (56) have been hired into Extension, many as 4-H Agents.

We are proud to report, that one of these ACMs that is now an Extension employee, Jarius Sanford, won the Georgia Serves (our state funder) Beyond the Call Award. This award, selected by the Georgia Serves Board of Trustees, is awarded to a Georgia AmeriCorps member (currently serving or having finished the previous service term) who embodies the values set forth in the AmeriCorps pledge to take action, seek common ground, and persevere in the face of adversity. Jarius served four terms in Houston County Extension/4-H.