

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

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 284 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 Urban Institute's 2015 Report on child poverty and adult success reports that children that live below the federal poverty line experience an increase in negative life outcomes. They "struggle academically, do not complete high school, and have spotty employment as young adults" (Ratcliff, 2018, p. 1). Although no direct relationship with employment and lower education achievement was found, 2015 US Bureau of Labor Statistics show that "lower educational achievement brings lower wages on average and dampened opportunities for upward mobility" (p. 6).

In their 5th report on the current and future economics of Georgia, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce propose that to assure the vitality of Georgia communities, individuals need to work together to strengthen local schools and that an investment "in public education is essential to future economic success for individuals, communities, businesses, and the state" (p. 2). To build a community of economic well-being and growth, students need a successful transition into postsecondary education and a career (p. 3).

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.

Many of the youth served by Georgia 4-H's AmeriCorps programs live in poverty or have experienced poverty. 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. The variety of programming and state-wide reach make Georgia 4-H an ideal organization to host AmeriCorps members.

Response: The goal of the VISTA project is to eliminate poverty. VISTAs build 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, attend postsecondary education, and become positive contributing citizens.

During the last year, Georgia 4-H had six VISTA members serving at the State 4-H Office, Southwest District Office, and county offices. VISTA members helped build capacity through volunteer development, fundraising, social marketing, and more.

All VISTA members attend an AmeriCorps VISTA Pre-Service Orientation (PSO). At PSO they receive training in capacity building, community assessment, issues surrounding poverty in America and their own service communities to help them perform their duties to the best of their abilities. They also participate in monthly webinars and seminars sponsored by both CNCS 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 43 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 in-school educational club meetings and 4-H Project Achievement. 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, and Policies, Procedures, and Protocols and 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. ACMs also participate in monthly webinars and are provided relevant trainings throughout their year-long term of service.

Currently in the seventh 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: Appling, Banks, Barrow, Ben Hill, Bibb, Bleckley, Bryan, Burke, Carroll, Catoosa, Chatham, Cherokee, Cobb, Coffee, Cherokee, Crisp, Decatur, Dougherty, Effingham, Fannin, Floyd, Fulton, Gilmer, Greene, Gwinnett, Hancock, Houston, Laurens, Lumpkin, Morgan, Murray, Muscogee, Oglethorpe, Peach, Pulaski, Putnam, Rockdale, Spalding, Sumter, Tift, Walker, Washington, and Wilkes.

Impact: Since 2010, 55 Georgia 4-H VISTAs have raised more than \$539,000 in cash resources, developed more than \$61,000 in noncash resources, produced more than 1,500 marketing pieces, and recruited more than 1,440 volunteers.

During the first seven years of the AmeriCorps State Grant, 229 full and half-time members have served more than 257,511 hours, reached more than 113,171 students through in-school



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programming, 73,228 students through 4-H Project Achievement and recruited nearly 1,500 volunteers that contributed over 15,570 hours.

The AmeriCorps State grant has grown significantly since July 2012. The first three-year grant provided 16 MSY per year (48 MSY total). In 2015 the grant grew to 32 MSY. The current program year we were awarded 33 MSY. Georgia 4-H is the largest AmeriCorps State program in Georgia. In addition to the \$2,657,464 in federal funds received, the AmeriCorps State grant has leveraged over \$519,000 in county and private funds 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 2017-2018 program year is provided below.

4-H In-School Educational Club Meetings - A grand total of 24,325 students were served by ACMs in in-school educational club meetings, exceeding the goal of 20,000. To measure content area learning, ACMs administered a total of 4,092 surveys to students after in-school educational club meetings. After removing duplicates (students that took surveys in more than one content area), our resulting sample set was 3,428. Of that sample set, 92% of students (3,154) showed an increase in and/or demonstrated knowledge of the content presented.

4-H Project Achievement - A grand total of 23,893 youth received instruction on the 4-H Project Achievement process from ACMs. This exceeds our goal of 10,000. Of those youth that received instruction, 14,441 developed a research-based presentation that was delivered in front of their peers and/or 4-H Agent. Of the students that continued on to compete at district-level Project Achievement, 1,542 completed a survey to measure mastery of best practices in public speaking and indicated confidence or an increase in confidence in public speaking. Of those students surveyed, 89% (1,366) demonstrated knowledge of best practices in public speaking or showed an increase in knowledge of best practices in public speaking and 85% (1,308) indicated confidence in public speaking or showed an increase in confidence in public speaking.

Volunteer Recruitment - ACMs recruited 353 new volunteers, exceeding the goal of 175. These volunteers contributed 4,946 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. AmeriCorps State members were surveyed regarding their overall satisfaction with the program.

- 91% agreed or strongly agreed with the following - I believe I made a positive impact on the community I served through the Georgia 4-H AmeriCorps State program.
- 100% agreed or strongly 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.
- 88% agreed or strongly 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.
- 100% agreed or strongly 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.



- 100% agreed or strongly agreed with the following - As a result of my service with Georgia 4-H, I am better prepared for future employment.



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