

AmeriCorps
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting
November 20, 2024
1:00 p.m. EDT

The Board of Directors for the Corporation for National and Community Service (operating as AmeriCorps) convened via video conference on November 20, 2024. The following members were present:

- Catherine McLaughlin, Chair
- Leslie Bluhm
- Lisette Nieves
- Flor Romero
- Shirley Sagawa

Also in attendance were:

- Michael Smith, CEO
- Mary Hyde, Director, Office of Research and Evaluation
- Sonali Nijhawan, Director, AmeriCorps State and National
- Atalaya Sergi, Director, AmeriCorps Seniors

Chair's Opening Statement

Board Chair Catherine McLaughlin called the meeting to order, welcomed the other participants, and then began with recognition of Native American Heritage Month, and a commitment to continue partnering with Native Tribes support the Tribes' unique needs and foster lasting and positive change for generations to come.

She next observed that since the previous board meeting in July, AmeriCorps had commemorated the agency's 30th anniversary as the nation's comprehensive Federal Agency for service and volunteering. She thanked Agency staff and everybody who supports the work the agency does across the country. Cathy additionally commented on the success of the AmeriCorps State and National Symposium that took place in Washington, DC in September. That symposium featured special guests Kaya Henderson, Gregory Jackson, and Heather McGhee. It also saw AmeriCorps' first-ever Native and Indigenous Leadership Service Awards.

Ms. McLaughlin continued with observations about the National Day of Service observed on the 23rd anniversary of 9/11. AmeriCorps members, AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers, program alumni, and partners joined together for service across the country. In New York, AmeriCorps Seniors Director Atalaya Sergi and ASN Director Sonali Nijhawan rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange. In Michigan, AmeriCorps members and volunteers helped beautify gardens at the Edgewood Village Network Center. Volunteers cleaned the gravestones of servicemen and women. In Washington, DC, AmeriCorps joined forces with government officials and packed more than 450,000 meals for people in need. She reminded listeners that "[e]ach of these activities is a reminder of how volunteering, even if it's done just one time, has the potential to spark a spirit of service or...inspire a lifetime of civic engagement in others."

Ms. McLaughlin next spoke about the AmeriCorps Seniors National Convening in Baltimore, which brought together more than 1,300 people, including AmeriCorps Seniors grantees and AmeriCorps' research and evaluation partners, to learn, share, collaborate, and celebrate. In addition to honoring

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AmeriCorps' anniversary, the convening celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Senior Companion Program.

Opening remarks concluded with a reflection on how the agency has reduced barriers for those who want to serve our country and on AmeriCorps' legacy of collaboration – for example, in the agency's work to distribute food and basic necessities when disasters strike, to inspire children to reach their goals in school, and to help build a stronger, healthier country. In this time of uncertainty and political division, AmeriCorps must stay fresh, innovative, and collaborative to find common ground so that we can do what we have always done best: Respond to the most critical issues of our time.

Ms. Mclaughlin next reviewed the agenda: First would be a shared discussion between Dr. Mary Hyde, who leads AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation, and board member Shirley Sagawa, about the new report on Volunteering and Civic Life in America. Next would be a report from the Oversight, Governance, and Audit (OGA) Committee, followed by a report from CEO Michael Smith. The meeting would then open for public comments.

Report on the Civic Engagement and Volunteering Survey

Dr. Hyde began by explaining that AmeriCorps has been in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau for more than 20 years to track the nation's civic health. We've done this through the Census Bureau's supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS) – a large, longitudinal, monthly survey that's been the primary source of U.S. labor force statistics since the 1940s. The survey's core module is the source of key indicators such as the national unemployment rate, and has supplemental questions about a variety of topics such as education, voting, and fertility. Many supplemental surveys are administered on a regular basis, but the frequency and content depend on the needs of the supplement sponsor. AmeriCorps is one of those supplement sponsors.

AmeriCorps' supplement to the survey, the Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement (CEV), is the most comprehensive longitudinal survey about volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement in the U.S. We sponsor it in partnership with the Census Bureau to take the pulse of our nation's civic health. We've done this every other year since 2017; there are related data sets going back to 2002. Taken together, these surveys informed AmeriCorps' research on volunteering and civic life in America. The CPS CEV is a cornerstone of our national service and civic engagement research; it is foundational research that provides evidence for why national service and volunteering matter.

Ms. Sagawa observed that this is the first such survey since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that previous research had shown a decline in Americans' engagement in formal volunteering. She asked Dr. Hyde if the latest data contained any good news. Dr. Hyde replied:

There is good news. A lot has changed. Formal volunteering is rebounding. The national volunteering rate has increased by 5 percentage points, a more than 22 percent growth in just

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two years. This is the largest expansion of formal volunteering ever recorded and truly showcases that the spirit of volunteerism is on the rise in America.

What this means is that more than 75.7 million people, or 28.3 percent of Americans, formally volunteered through an organization between September of 2022 and September of 2023, giving more than 4.99 billion hours of service, with \$167.2 billion of economic value.

Ms. Sagawa observed that the answer was qualified by the term "formal volunteering," and noted that there's a whole continuum of volunteering that occurs in the U.S., including what many people think of – and the survey report describes as – helping. She asked Dr. Hyde to comment on that.

Dr. Hyde explained that there's a distinction between formal volunteering through an organization and informal helping or informal interactions with neighbors. We track both as part of the civic health of our country:

...[T]here's been a 3 percentage point increase in informal helping, and that translates to more than 137.5 million people, or 54.2 percent of Americans who help their neighbors informally or outside of an organization. People continue to help each other informally during the pandemic, making this 3 percentage point increase both statistically significant and impactful in Americans' day-to-day lives. This 3-point increase since 2021 amounts to 12.9 million more informal helpers in our country.

She went on to say that highlighting informal helping as a critical element of civic life matters because not everyone is able to volunteer through an organization. Communities across the country vary in their organizational infrastructure – for instance, many nonprofits and faith-based organizations draw on an urban versus a rural community. Likewise, there's wide variability in how much time people have to formally volunteer, whether because people are working multiple jobs, caring for children or parents, or lack transportation to get to an organization. And not all Americans are invited to volunteer; formerly marginalized groups are often underrepresented by community processes and organizational affiliations. For these reasons, AmeriCorps takes a stance that it is important for the agency to elevate all kinds of contributions to civic life, including informal helping.

Ms. Sagawa next asked about the new measure in the survey, for virtual volunteering. Dr. Hyde responded that yes, AmeriCorps worked with the Census Bureau to add this. The new virtual volunteering measure is grounded in research that we've been sponsoring with Dr. Jennifer Crittenden at the University of Maine, and it suggests that virtual or hybrid volunteering can increase both opportunity and access to formal volunteering.

While the majority, or 82 percent, of formal volunteers served completely in person in 2023, about 1 out of 5 formal volunteers – more than 13.4 million people – engaged in volunteer activities that were either completely virtual or hybrid during this period. And compared to those who volunteer completely in person, virtual and hybrid volunteers serve more hours per

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year, are slightly older, and are more likely to live with a disability.

These preliminary, first-ever findings help us challenge the digital ageism that gets perpetuated. And it has implications for accessibility, as indicated by those living with a disability being able to volunteer in ways that perhaps they couldn't before this opportunity.

Ms. Sagawa then asked whether the survey addresses differences in the ways people of different backgrounds are able to, or choose to, volunteer.

Ms. Hyde replied that in the 2023 data (which covered formal volunteering from 20221 through 2023), we saw some changes in some of the demographic makeup of volunteers:

Some of the largest relative gains were among millennials (ages 27 to 42); among people who identified as Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander or Hispanic; those with less than a high school education; and people with family incomes of less than \$25,000 a year. Those demographic groups really saw some very big leaps post-COVID in this data set.

We also saw a couple of traditional patterns that persisted among demographic groups. For example, women still volunteer at a higher rate than men. In 2023, that meant that 30.9 percent of women volunteered formally compared to 25.6 percent of men. Similarly, a persistent pattern we've seen over the years is that parents with children under 18 formally volunteer at a higher rate than those without children in their household – a 12 percentage points difference. Parents with children under 18 volunteer at a rate of 37 percent. Those without children volunteered at a rate of 25 percent. That's a pretty consistent pattern over the years.

Wrapping up the conversation, Ms. Sagawa asked for Dr. Hyde's thoughts about the next steps that we take, now that we have all this data available. Dr. Hyde said she would give three primary calls to action for anyone listening to the meeting. She first invited people to explore the data on national and state trends on AmeriCorps' new, user-friendly dashboard at data.americorps.gov. Second, she encouraged people to read the report. It's called Renewed Engagement in American Civic Life. It's just eight pages long, with lots of visuals, and very digestible. Interested listeners can find it at americorps.gov/about/impact. And third, she encourages everyone to go out and engage in their community in whatever way makes sense to them.

Report of the Oversight, Governance, and Audit Committee

Lisette Nieves reported that the Oversight, Governance, and Audit (OGA) Committee continues to support the Agency as it fully engages in the second year of reform activity. She reminded listeners that because their terms on the board have ended, Alvin Warren and Fagan Harris no longer serve on the committee, but their support and engagement have been much appreciated.

Ms. Nieves and Ms. Sagawa are now the committee's two members.

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Ms. Nieves reported that while work on Financial and Operational Reform has been challenging, it's showing results. Twenty prior-year recommendations have been closed and the agency has eliminated one of the material weaknesses – progress that should be celebrated. The progress reinforces the need to continue with the plan and commit resources to see it completed. The committee is confident that these foundational investments will provide what is needed to see further gains in each successful audit.

The work on Financial and Operational Reform is not easy, and the committee members appreciate the engagement and efforts of AmeriCorps' staff. It's essential that we have internal leadership to make all these necessary changes. The committee will continue to meet every quarter, with the next meeting to be scheduled soon. Ms. Nieves let listeners know that if they had feedback or would like to provide input, they can send a note to board@americorps.gov.

Following Ms. Nieves' OGA report, Ms. McLaughlin asked Michael Smith for the CEO report.

The Chief Executive Officer's Report

CEO Michael Smith opened his report by extending a heartfelt thanks in acknowledgment of “the last 11 months reflecting on and celebrating 30 years of impact, transformation, and learning together” and echoed Ms. McLaughlin's appreciation for the spirit of collaboration that makes AmeriCorps' work so successful:

Collaboration has enhanced our national service movement and it's because of our shared commitment to AmeriCorps and our shared commitment to AmeriCorps values that we have gotten big things done for America, which is so incredibly important...We're delivering outstanding results for our Agency and for the future of our national service movement...We invested in communities that needed us most by securing partnerships with government agencies and private organizations

Mr. Smith highlighted:

- The launch of Public Health AmeriCorps with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where we have increased capacity in local public health settings and started building the next generation of public health leaders. Public Health AmeriCorps has invested more than \$200 million in more than 100 organizations where more than 5,000 members are serving today.
- Implementation of an AmeriCorps Seniors Demonstration Program, investing approximately \$5 million for projects that use service as a reentry point for more than 300 AmeriCorps Senior volunteers to stay in or return to the workforce
- Reinvestment in our nation-to-nation relationship with sovereign Tribes and Native organizations.
- Relative to fiscal year 2021, nearly doubled the minimum living allowance and stipend for AmeriCorps members across all programs

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- Prioritized grantees who provide wraparound benefits like housing, stipends, transportation, and emergency funds, which promotes the safety and the security of our members and ensures that service is not a luxury for the few but an opportunity – “an extraordinary transformational opportunity” – for the many
- Embarked on a significant review process of our grants programs, including modifying grantee match requirements, clarifying match waiver requirements, and removing term limit barriers.
- With the Schultz Family Foundation, Pinterest, and AmeriCorps Forward, launched the Youth Mental Health Corps, providing 11 states with grants to plan or implement Youth Mental Health Corps programs in their states and engage almost 1,000 young people in service to meet immediate critical needs in schools and communities while accessing on-ramps into the behavioral health workforce.
- Working alongside other federal agencies and Bloomberg Philanthropies, we launched Energy Communities AmeriCorps, a VISTA program that works in energy transition communities.

Mr. Smith spoke next about AmeriCorps’ response efforts in the wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton earlier this fall:

As many of you know, these storms disproportionately impacted the Southeastern part of our country, and AmeriCorps responded quickly. We are actively engaged in response efforts in impacted areas from both hurricanes. We have nearly 500 AmeriCorps members serving with AmeriCorps NCCC, our FEMA Corps program, and personnel responding to serve with a variety of partners in operations in Florida, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Georgia, and even right here in Washington, DC.

And I have to say that I am incredibly proud of the AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams, or as we like to call them, A-DRTs – A-DRTs like Conservation Corps North Carolina or Florida Conservation Corps, who are always ready to be deployed at a moment’s notice, providing much-needed wraparound support for tasks like mucking, gutting, debris removal, and other critical services. Currently, there are 292 AmeriCorps members who are still on the ground helping with active recovery – another reminder of how AmeriCorps stays long after the cameras go away.

And I just want to say a special hello to those Rocky Mountain Youth Corps A-DRTs. I was with recently with that A-DRT team in Florida and with our California Conservation Corps and our Florida Conservation Corps. You inspired me so much, and it was so wonderful to see how you came from other parts of that state and other parts of the country to make such a big difference in the lives of those who are dealing with one of the most challenging moments they’ve ever faced.

Addressing the Administration transition ahead, Mr. Smith affirmed that AmeriCorps has always chosen to turn outward, looking for how we can help others, as the new data around volunteering proves. As Dr. Hyde and Ms. Sagawa discussed, our new CEV data shows that volunteering has

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rebounded and it is on the rise in America. He reminded listeners that we must continue to work together as a nation and as civic leaders to sustain that positive trend.

Additionally, the data on virtual volunteering show that innovation and adaptability matter. Being able to volunteer virtually benefits individuals with disabilities and for our elders. Our data also show corporate volunteering matters: More than 61.3 million people were encouraged to participate in a workplace volunteering day, provide pro bono services, or make a difference in the community in 2023. We are witnessing a remarkable resurgence in volunteering, and by focusing on impact rather than just counting the hours of service, we are closing the gap between those in need and the support that they deserve. And AmeriCorps has been at the heart of this comeback.

AmeriCorps has been innovative and nimble in our approach to respond to our nation's most pressing challenges, and that will never change. Everyone listening plays an important role in the national service ecosystem, and together, we are building a stronger, more connected nation.

Mr. Smith reminded listeners of the quote from Dr. King: "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve." "You don't have to have a college degree to serve," Dr. King said. "You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

Mr. Smith concluded by thanking everyone for the service that strengthens communities and transforms lives, and for the grace and the love that fuels our shared mission. It is truly making a difference.

Final Comments by the Board Chair

Ms. McLaughlin thanked Mr. Smith for his remarks and then opened the meeting for public comments. There were no respondents, so upon a move to adjourn from Lisette Nieves, Ms. McLaughlin adjourned the meeting at 1:37 p.m.