



EVENT PLANNING TOOLKIT

TAKE THE FIRST STEPS

1. **Designate an event coordinator**
2. **Settle on a time**
3. **Secure a venue**
4. **Map out a budget**

Designate an event coordinator: This person is the primary point of contact for planning your event. Coordinators can develop a list of tasks and corresponding deadlines, and oversee the completion of these tasks. You can establish an event committee if you want additional help making decisions and carrying out tasks. You can also use your Board of Directors, Advisory Committee, State Service Commissioners, and other grantees as resources during the planning process. Still looking for more assistance? You may seek pro bono help from a public relations or event planning firm.

Settle on a time: When looking for a venue, keep in mind a range of possible dates. Flexibility may save you money or open up the possibility of donated event space.

Secure a venue: When looking for a venue, we also recommend you:

- Think big. Consider inviting other national service programs, elected officials, key community stakeholders, and individuals and organizations you hope to network with.
- Ensure that your venue is large enough to accommodate your expected audience.
- Reach out to partners – a state or local agency, grantee, board member, or funder – who may have venue recommendations or want to contribute in another way.
- Make sure you know if permits are required or special conditions apply to your venue.
- Consider audio/visual needs for your events. Do you want to show videos, photos, or use Facebook Live to stream your event?
- Think ahead for day-of needs, and have a contingency plan for bad weather if you are planning an outside event.

Map out a budget: Put event costs in a detailed spreadsheet. Seek out donations and in-kind support from private sector or foundation partners. Look for pro bono help on event planning and media. If you have questions about how to allocate time or resources to your grant, consult with your program/grants officer.

BUILD A CROWD

1. **Make an invitation list**
2. **Reach out to alumni**
3. **Send invitations**
4. **Track attendees**

Make an invitation list: Events are ideal for engaging a large number of stakeholders. As you make your list, think big and don't overlook the obvious: your national service family, AmeriCorps and Senior Corps grantees, AmeriCorps alumni, former Senior Corps volunteers, locally serving national service teams, members, or volunteers. [Check out the CNCS State Profiles for information.](#)

- For AmeriCorps NCCC and FEMA Corps, ask the regional campus near you for a list of sponsors and currently serving teams.
- For AmeriCorps National Direct programs in your state, contact your program officer.

Reach out to alumni: Engage with alumni on social media, email invitations, and share other ways alumni can participate in your event. AmeriCorps Alums, now under Service Year Alliance, may also be a resource if you want to connect directly to AmeriCorps alumni.

Save the date and invite: Once you have your venue and time secured, send a "save the date" to your invitees. When you have a system for capturing RSVPs, send out the invitation. It is always a good idea to send your invitation more than once and plan an event reminder message with any last-minute details.

Track attendees: When publicizing your event, use an online registration tool, such as [Eventbrite.com](#). This can help you streamline your list-management, head count, and follow-up processes.

CREATE A DAZZLING PROGRAM

1. **Determine your program**
2. **Invite elected officials to speak**
3. **Find an emcee**
4. **Follow program protocol**
5. **Plan for accessibility**
6. **Consider audio-visual**

Determine your program: A well thought out program can make or break your event. Start determining who your speakers will be as soon as possible and draft a program that fits in your event timeline. We recommend a brief kick-off and then get your volunteers doing what they came to do: SERVE.

If you choose to make the program the focus of the event, be sure to plan logistics for each speaker and keep to the scheduled times. If there is a topic you want them to cover, let them know in advance. We recommend written remarks to be 50 words for each minute allotted to the speaker. If you allotted five minutes for a speaker's remarks, aim for 250 words in her written remarks.

Consider how you want to deliver your message: several speakers or one keynote. If you limit speaking times, you can include more speakers, who each bring something unique to the program. We recommend including a member, volunteer, or alumni as a speaker because they often have compelling stories about service. Depending on the event, you may want to include someone who has been a beneficiary of service. You may ask other validators of service like elected officials, board members, corporate or other donors, and site placement sponsors.

Create an outline of the program as soon as possible. Include a draft run-of-show with speakers and other components such as a color guard, the Pledge of Allegiance, the National Anthem, or musical performances. The presentation of colors is usually conducted by a military, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), Coast Guard, National Guard, or scout color guard. Book color guards and performers well in advance.

Invite elected officials to speak: Identify bipartisan federal, state, and local elected officials to speak at your event. These may include a U.S. Senator or House Member, Governor or Lt. Governor, Mayor, a school board representative, city council person, or state-level representative. Bipartisanship is important because national service has always garnered support from all sides and we want speakers to reflect this. When you send an invitation letter to an elected official, make sure it is formal. If you are unsure about which elected officials to invite, or how to go about it, contact governmentrelations@cns.gov for assistance.

Find an emcee: Consider inviting a local television anchor or other local leader to emcee your program. A television anchor not only ensures professional delivery, but can increase visibility. You may consider asking a local partner or supporter.

Follow program protocol: Make sure your speaking order and seating arrangements follow proper protocol, which typically has the lowest ranking official speaking first and the highest ranking official last. Staff members of elected officials may not have a speaking role, but make sure you acknowledge and thank them for attending. If you have questions about program protocol, contact governmentrelations@cns.gov.

Plan for accessibility: Arrange for an interpreter for hearing-impaired attendees and a designated seating area accessible to those in a wheelchair. Include an accessibility needs question on your RSVP, and follow up with guests who need special accommodations.

Consider audio-visual needs: If your budget and venue allow, we recommend including a video projection at your event. Run a video or slideshow as attendees enter and exit the venue, and

incorporate visuals into your program. If you plan to live stream, you will need high-speed internet access. Test before the event to make sure the connection is strong enough to support live stream. [For video assets, please check the 25th Anniversary web page.](#)

PRE-EVENT PREPARATIONS

1. **Build your event**
2. **Deliver your announcement**
3. **Prepare your speakers**
4. **Gather your assets**

Build your event: Consider these logistics as you get closer to your event:

- Do you need a sound system, pipe and drape, chairs, podium, signage, or flags?
- Do you need to build a stage, risers for performers, or a press riser?
- Do you need a multi-box (box with multiple outputs to connect audio) for press?
- Do you need buses to transport attendees? Do they need to stay overnight?
- Do you need security?
- Do you need a professional photographer/videographer?
- Is there a pre- or post-event gathering? If so, how can you leverage your network to secure a space?
- Do you need an event planner to optimize your venue and program?

Deliver your announcement: Your event may be a great opportunity for an announcement.

What do you want to amplify? Here are a few ideas:

- New program that presents new member opportunities and benefits to the community
- New partnership that expands service opportunities
- Impact data that highlights accomplishments of your program
 - 2019 is a milestone year for national service and could be a great time to aggregate 25 years of accomplishments
- New grants available or coming soon
 - Include number of positions, federal funding, local match, and Segal AmeriCorps Education Award for AmeriCorps. Include number of positions, federal funding, and local funding for Senior Corps.

Prepare your speakers:

- Provide talking points to speakers and elected officials.

- Help AmeriCorps members and alumni, and Senior Corps volunteers polish their service stories.

Gather your assets:

- Do you need proclamations for governors or mayors to use for the anniversary or other event?
- Are your members wearing AmeriCorps or Senior Corps gear? Do you have Day of Service branding? Do you have site signs and banners? We recommend prominent branding.

SPREAD THE WORD

- 1. Alert the media**
- 2. Prepare your spokespeople**
- 3. Prepare your reporters**
- 4. Provide an early media availability period**
- 5. Market the event**
- 6. Tell us what's happening!**

The 25th anniversary only comes around once, so we urge you to use all the tools at your disposal to make the biggest splash possible. Develop an event communications plan early on and use traditional and social media channels to boost awareness.

Alert the media:

- Compile a pitch list of reporters you want to cover your event. Gather contact info for assignment editors at television and radio stations, print reporters who cover beats that pertain to the issues service addresses (education, health, poverty, nonprofits, etc). Include prominent bloggers or online news sources in your pitch list.
- Contact your local print, television, and radio media to pitch stories about your service members and programs using media advisories, press releases, and phone calls. Pitch stories and editorial commentaries in the month prior to the event. Get your event listed on community calendars.
- Write blog posts and place them in your organization's blog and other blogs in your community that are neighborhood or issue specific. Pitch your story to bloggers in your community that have influence with the audiences you are trying to reach.
- Create messaging that highlights your successes for each of the social media platform you use (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc.).

Prepare your spokespeople: Determine your lead spokesperson, who can talk to the media. Provide talking points and conduct practice interviews your spokesperson. We also recommend you have several members, volunteers, and alumni prepared to tell their stories. Anyone interacting with the media needs strong national service branding.

Prepare your reporters: Provide a lot of background about AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, your Day of Service initiative, and what the program has done in your state/community to reporters. National service has a great story; make it easy for reporters to tell it. Provide fact sheets, press packets, and programs to reporters and interested officials.

Provide an early media availability period: Have a media availability period for program speakers and participants *before the event* to better facilitate deadlines for evening news broadcasts and weekend print media, especially if you have an afternoon event.

Market the event: Use your email lists to ramp up excitement about your event and use social media, like Facebook and Twitter, for further promotion. You may also ask local partners to help you promote your event.

Tell us what's happening: It's important for us at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) headquarters to know what is happening around the country, especially if you are planning a swearing-in event or a "day of service" project. Once we know, we can help deploy speakers and other resources, work with national media, and amplify your story.

[Register your event on the 25th Anniversary web page.](#)