

MONTANA CAMPUS COMPACT

Pre-Interview Packet



Thank you for applying to the Montana Campus Compact AmeriCorps program - we are excited to learn more about you and your commitment to service! In this packet, you will find an overview of our organizational values, opportunities to learn and reflect, and additional materials to help you prepare for your upcoming interview.

Our Mission:

Montana Campus Compact (MTCC) advances the public purposes of colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility.

What does that mean?

We remove barriers to education access.

We deepen students' engagement in the community.

We strengthen partnerships between colleges and nonprofits.

MTCC AmeriCorps members help us to accomplish this mission by serving for a year or more in Montana communities where they support college attainment and strengthen local nonprofits and government agencies. Since 1993, hundreds of MTCC AmeriCorps members have helped us to pursue this vision, improving community life for all Montanans. You have already taken your first steps to joining our mission-driven service team!

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What was your educational experience like? Who inspired, mentored, and empowered you throughout that experience? How has your economic/racial/cultural/personal background influenced your educational goals and opportunities?

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

– Nelson Mandela

“The ability to read, write, and analyze; the confidence to stand up and demand justice and equality; the qualifications and connections to get your foot in the door and take your seat at the table—all of that starts with education.”

– Michelle Obama

“The content of a book holds the power of education and it is with this power that we can shape our future and change lives.”

– Malala Yousafzai

We Value: Educational Equity

Montana Campus Compact recognizes that not all students have the same educational opportunities and resources in our state. College graduation rates in Montana are lower than the national average, and students from low-income families, in particular, are less likely to apply to college. Our members work to make education equitable for underserved populations through peer mentorship, college application support, veteran support, food security projects, and academic success programs. We believe strongly that all young people have the potential to succeed academically, and are passionate about empowering students to reach their academic and career goals in order to move out of the cycle of poverty.

Reflection from Previous MTCC Members:

- [When One Door Closes, Another Opens](#) by Megan Ahern
- [The Heart of Service](#) by Loni Neilson-Kattell

Resources on Educational Equity

- [“The Education Deserts of Rural America”](#) by Adam Harris
- [“For Native Students, Education’s Promise Has Long Been Broken”](#) by Kelly Field
- [“From Rez to City: American Indian Students Face Unique Challenges at Non-Native Schools”](#) by Cameron Evans
- [“The ‘Opportunity Gap’ in US Public Education – and How to Close it”](#) by Anindya Kundu (TED Talk)



We Value: Social Justice

Montana Campus Compact is rooted in creating more just outcomes for the individuals we serve. We recognize that poverty, bias, and opportunity gaps exist in our state and country. Through service to the community, our AmeriCorps members seek to alleviate poverty, honor human dignity, and serve marginalized populations. MTCC AmeriCorps members address the root causes of inequality and poverty across the state, transforming both their communities and themselves.

Reflection from Previous MTCC Members:

- [Starting Over](#) by Ashley Hettler
- [MLK Read for Peace](#) by MTCC Staff

Resources on Social Justice

- [“Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians”](#) by Montana Office of Public Instruction
- [“America Can’t Fix Poverty Until It Stops Hating Poor People”](#) by John Powell and Arthur Brooks
- [“Let’s Start by Understanding Our Own Biases”](#) by Sara Grossman
- [“The Danger of a Single Story”](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (TED Talk)



“I serve because service is a radical act of love.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are your beliefs about the root causes of poverty and inequity? What is your motivation for wanting to do social impact work? What populations or causes are you most motivated to work with?

“When we identify where our privilege intersects with somebody else's oppression, we'll find our opportunities to make real change.”
– Ijeoma Oluo

“There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures.”
– Bell Hooks

“Justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other — that my liberty depends on you being free too.”
– Barack Obama

“Until the great mass of people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained.”
– Helen Keller



We Value: Service to Community

Service to community is at the root of Montana Campus Compact's work. As an organization, we support colleges and universities statewide that want to engage with and address needs in their communities. Further, we believe that service to community is necessary for the success of a robust and democratic society. Our AmeriCorps members are purposeful, mission-driven, and dedicated to making an impact.

Reflection from Previous MTCC Members:

- [The Duty to Serve](#) by Jenson Lillquist
- [Paying it Forward](#) by Adam Maes

Resources on Service to Community

- ["Helping, Fixing or Serving?"](#) by Rachel Naomi Remen
- ["A Culture of Caring"](#) by Katherine Mangan and Julia Schmalz

We Value: Personal Development

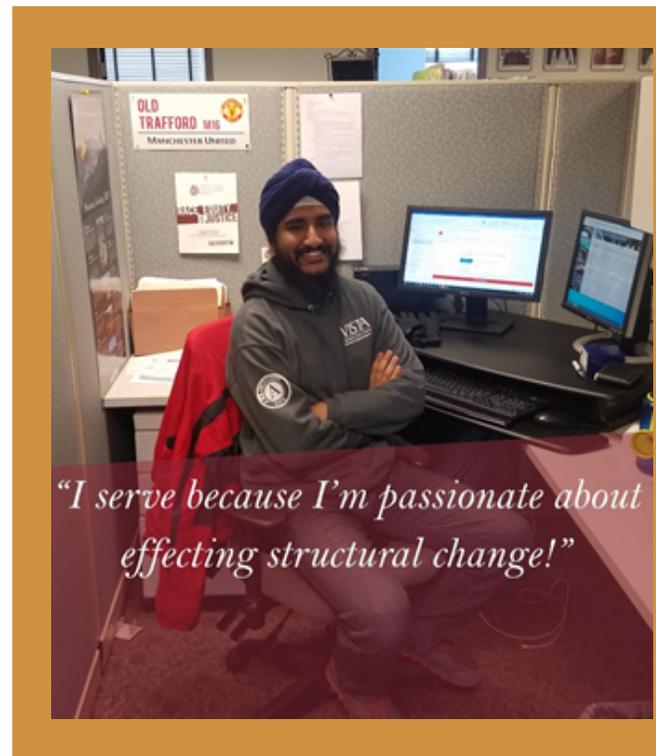
At Montana Campus Compact, we believe that a year of AmeriCorps service is a valuable opportunity for professional development and personal growth. As a program, we strive to make this a reality for all of our AmeriCorps members. We seek service site supervisors who are excited to mentor our members, helping them to develop their professional skills. Members also attend four in-person training sessions during the service year, which cover topics valuable to your life in service and beyond. AmeriCorps members leave at the end of the year with lifelong friends, professional skills, and, quite often, a transformed worldview.

Reflection from Previous MTCC Members:

- [Amber Mountains](#) by Chloe Weber
- [An Extrovert Alone](#) by Alexis Burton

Resources on Service to Community

- ["AmeriCorps Leaves Lasting Impression on Alumni"](#) by AmeriCorps
- ["Where Are They Now?"](#) by Compact Nation Podcast



"I serve because I'm passionate about effecting structural change!"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What is the difference between service and volunteering?
What is one way you expect the community you serve will educate you or bring you joy? How are you hoping to grow professionally during your service year? How are you hoping to grow personally?

"Only by being a man or woman for others, does one become fully human." – Pedro Arrupe

"Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world." – Howard Zinn

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others." – Mahatma Gandhi

AmeriCorps Service Details – What Should I Know Before I Join?

It's no secret - choosing to serve as an AmeriCorps member won't make you rich. Our members live simply, and have their basic needs met. They learn to be creative with their time and money, often picking up DIY skills over the course of the year, fine-tuning their home cooking, and reevaluating the way they spend their free time. Below is information about finances and other details of interest.

Loans

During your service term, you may qualify to put your student loans into forbearance or an income-based repayment plan. There are a number of possible loan strategies to consider. The AmeriCorps [website](#) offers some guidance, but we always recommend discussing your options with your loan provider.

Transportation

Montana is a rural state, and some of our AmeriCorps positions require a vehicle. Make sure to read each service site description carefully for this detail. In our bigger cities, such as Missoula, Billings, and Bozeman, it is possible for members to get by without vehicles. Many members use public transportation, bike, or walk.

Public Assistance

Many of our AmeriCorps members qualify for, and utilize, public assistance programs, such as food assistance ([SNAP](#)). If you are interested in learning more about this resource, you can contact your community's local Office of Public Assistance at the start of your service term.

Relocation

Montana Campus Compact AmeriCorps includes members from two separate programs, each with slightly different financial benefits. The AmeriCorps Leaders program can offer a \$100 relocation allowance. The AmeriCorps VISTA program can offer \$750 plus \$.40 per mile. All relocation allowances are disbursed after the member arrives in Montana and begins a term of service.

Living Allowance

Montana Campus Compact AmeriCorps includes members from two separate programs, each with slightly different financial benefits. Service members in the AmeriCorps State program receive \$634 (pre-tax) bi-weekly. Service members in the AmeriCorps VISTA program receive \$576 (pre-tax) bi-weekly. The living allowance in either program presents an opportunity to live frugally and in solidarity with the communities you are serving. The allowance is based on poverty rates for a single individual in our geographical region.

Check out [this blog](#) from the Campus Compact of New York and Pennsylvania's VISTA Leader about living on the AmeriCorps stipend.

Housing

Montana Campus Compact AmeriCorps members are responsible for finding their own housing during the service term. In the weeks or months before your service begins, our staff and host site supervisors will be in contact with you to share housing resources, talk about entering the community, and to connect you with current AmeriCorps members in the community. In this way, we hope that we can help you identify appropriate housing.

Relocation Questions

How does your present lifestyle reflect, or not reflect, a simpler, more frugal lifestyle? After reading this section, do you believe there are any financial barriers to joining an MTCC AmeriCorps program? Do you have any questions for MTCC staff about your income as an AmeriCorps member?

Reflection Questions:

What are your personal stress triggers and how do you plan to address and handle them during service?

Do you currently have a self-care plan? Do you follow it? Do you have an emergency self-care plan?

Have you experienced any big changes in your life that may lead to additional stress? How have you dealt with stress in the past? How do you normally resolve stressful situations?

What resources do you anticipate needing during your service? How can you ensure that you will have these resources during your service term?

AmeriCorps and Self-Care

Montana Campus Compact values the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of our members. We know that when service members are healthy and happy, they have a greater capacity to serve their communities. As an organization, MTCC believes in creating healthy boundaries between work and personal life.

Although a service year is rewarding and transformational, service members may experience stressful situations. During the service year, you may experience an issue with a roommate, face financial difficulty, or feel homesick. You may even be faced with culture shock if you are entering a community that is different from your home. Sometimes, it may be difficult for you to decompress at the end of a service day, so it is important for you to understand that service is a community effort. You won't ever be truly alone while serving, and knowing your limits and your supports in advance is key. After all, if you are unable to take care of yourself, it will be difficult for you to offer help to another person.

Our Montana Campus Compact staff are keenly aware of these challenges thanks to their personal experiences in AmeriCorps and Peace Corps. We prioritize member support, scheduling regular check-ins, host site visits, and member trainings. We also value service members who are communicative, self-aware, and willing to reflect and advocate for their personal well-being.



Additional AmeriCorps FAQ

Can you tell me more about the trainings?

MTCC knows that the most successful AmeriCorps members are those with the skills and knowledge to act, not only confidently, but responsibly and responsively to the needs of their communities and host sites. That is why all of our AmeriCorps members will participate in at least five major trainings during the service year.

Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) - In order to prepare you and your AmeriCorps cohort for the service year, MTCC organizes and delivers a multi-day, in-person orientation for all members during their first days of service. Not only is this an opportunity for members to deepen their understanding of service, but it is also a chance to get to know your service cohort.

Topics covered at PSO include: An overview of the history of AmeriCorps and your role as a service member; Essential understandings of Montana's Native American communities; and the nature of poverty in Montana.

Community Building Institute (CBI) - As the service year gets underway, MTCC provides this virtual training to AmeriCorps members. The intention of CBI is to give participants a deeper understanding of the ins-and-outs of community-focused work, particularly that in the nonprofit sector.

Topics covered at CBI include: Community assessment; Project evaluation; and Strategic planning.

Building Engaged Citizens (BEC) - Late in the autumn, MTCC reconvenes our AmeriCorps members for an in-person training. This is a chance for members to reconnect with friends from around the state while further developing their professional skills.

Topics covered at BEC include: Resume writing; Self-advocacy and professional collaboration; Empathy and an ethic of service.

ServeMontana Symposium - Often referred to simply as "Symposium", this event is organized by the Governor's Office of Community Service in Helena. Every March, this phenomenal event brings together over 300 AmeriCorps members from across the state. Held in the state capital, it's an opportunity to connect with service members from other organizations and communities.

Topics vary by year, but always include a large selection of keynote speakers and breakout sessions where members can gain knowledge relevant to their service.

Close of Service (CoS) - All good things must come to an end, but that doesn't mean we can't celebrate that they happened. In the final month of your service year, you will join with your fellow AmeriCorps members for a last group training and farewell. Perhaps more than any other event during the year, CoS is an opportunity to reflect on the impacts of your service and to enjoy the company of your friends.

Topics vary by year, but include reflection activities, peer-to-peer teaching opportunities, and other topics that may be valuable to members' future career goals.

Other trainings - AmeriCorps host sites will often offer members additional trainings specific to their daily duties. They may also ask you to attend conferences and events that are pertinent to your service. These can vary by host site and year, but they can be great opportunities for professional growth.

What's the relationship of MTCC to AmeriCorps and Service Sites?

Simply put, MTCC plays the role of an intermediary, bridging the gap between AmeriCorps as a national organization and local Montana organizations who need the support of AmeriCorps members. Funding for AmeriCorps members is distributed from Washington D.C. to MTCC via state and regional AmeriCorps offices. With that funding, MTCC is able to cover the living stipends and education awards of members placed at our many partner service sites. In turn, our partner sites apply for a certain number of AmeriCorps members each year. Based on funding and need, MTCC allots a certain number of members to each site. The sites then oversee the day-to-day service of their members while MTCC provides overall monitoring and support.

Who does what?

AmeriCorps | Provides funding, monitors programs for efficacy

MTCC | Places members with host sites, monitors member service activities, trains members

Service Site | Engages member in meaningful service, oversees member's daily activities, serves as the first line of support for member in their service

Will service advance my long-term goals?

Of course, that depends on your goals, but for most people the answer will be “yes.” In addition to the personal and professional development available from formal trainings, MTCC AmeriCorps will give you other unique, career-advancing opportunities.

First of all, our service sites trust that the AmeriCorps matches they receive will be motivated and dependable individuals. Site supervisors know that what a member may lack in experience or professional credentials, they will more than make up for by their dedication and willingness to learn. As such, AmeriCorps members find themselves in positions where they have more responsibility and agency than in many entry-level jobs. This makes service a great opportunity to develop your leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and critical thinking skills.

For those curious about careers in the non-profit or government sectors, a year of service also gives you the opportunity to explore how these organizations operate and where you might see yourself fitting in after your AmeriCorps experience concludes. Many members are able to affirm their passions at the end of the year; others have discovered fresh directions to explore

To top it all off, as an affiliate of Campus Compact and of the University of Montana, you will be in an excellent position to consider options for micro-credentials and professional certificates, such as through the Campus Compact [Community Engagement Professional Program](#) or the University of Montana [Nonprofit Administration Online Program](#).

Who's going to be there to support me?

No AmeriCorps member is truly alone in service, and there are several key supports in place to help you navigate your experience. MTCC and our host sites are aware of the personal sacrifices that members must make to serve, as such, we take our members' support and well-being very seriously.

The first line of support will always be your host site supervisor. They will be the individual who work with you on your projects from day-to-day. For members relocating from out of state, your supervisor can also play a key role in helping you to enter and acclimate to a new community.

The MTCC VISTA Leader and Senior Leader also play a key role. These AmeriCorps members serve in the MTCC office, and their mission is to help, support, and guide our members across the state. The VISTA and Senior Leader are second-year AmeriCorps members who draw upon their own national service experience to fulfill their roles. They are a key point of contact who support the AmeriCorps cohort's development and individual members' well-being.

Beyond the VISTA and Senior Leader, the MTCC staff at-large bring a deep understanding of the member experience to our work. Most of our staff are AmeriCorps or Peace Corps alumni, and our personal experience informs our present-day work.

For members who want to be able to find support outside of the daily service environment, MTCC is also happy to offer members free access to [Life Expert](#) employee well-being services. These include virtual access to qualified counselors, life-coaching and legal consultations, and other valuable resources.

Last, but not least, our members can often be each other's best supports. As you make friends in your cohort, you may discover creative solutions to shared challenges. Simply having peers to navigate the experience with can go a very long way, and is perhaps the most valuable asset available to any of our AmeriCorps members.

What are strategies for making the most of the living allowance?

There are many strategies you can use to make the most of the living allowance. Key strategies include researching your eligibility for public benefits while in service, taking advantage of community services such as food banks, and generally finding ways to reduce consumption.

If you're worried about getting bored in your free time, rest assured; as a service state, Montana stands out in regards to "cheap" entertainment. With acres of public lands, state and national parks, and a general outdoors spirit, you can expect no end of opportunities for hiking, camping, and exploring – it may only cost you a split tank of gas with friends!

You might also take the opportunity to pick up low-cost pastimes. Perhaps you'll take advantage of the local library while you study a new subject. Maybe you'll find a used guitar and teach yourself to play. Or it just might be that service becomes your opportunity to focus on creative interests, such as art and writing, free from other distractions.

For those who know they will need some extra cash, AmeriCorps members are generally permitted to take an additional part-time job, so long as doing so doesn't interfere with their service commitments. And last, but not least, members who have federal student loans may be eligible to defer repayments during their service term.

P.S. Did you know that there's no sales tax in Montana? It's a small thing, but it helps to keep the cost of living down.

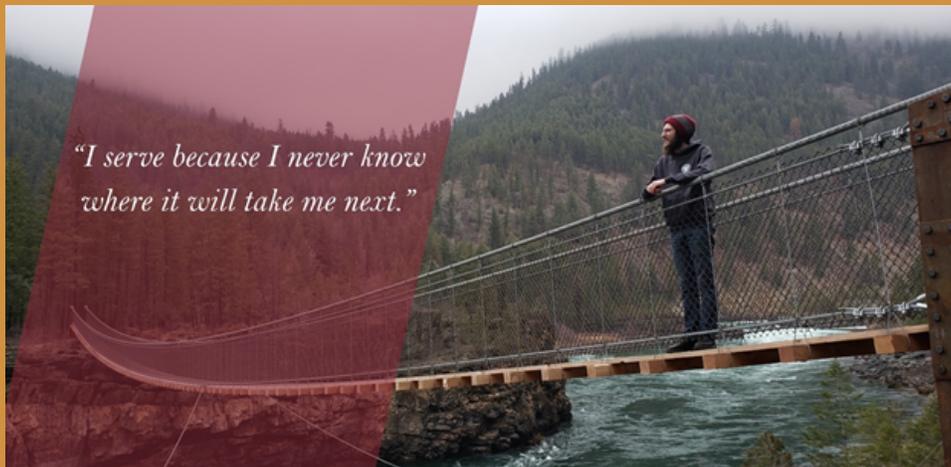
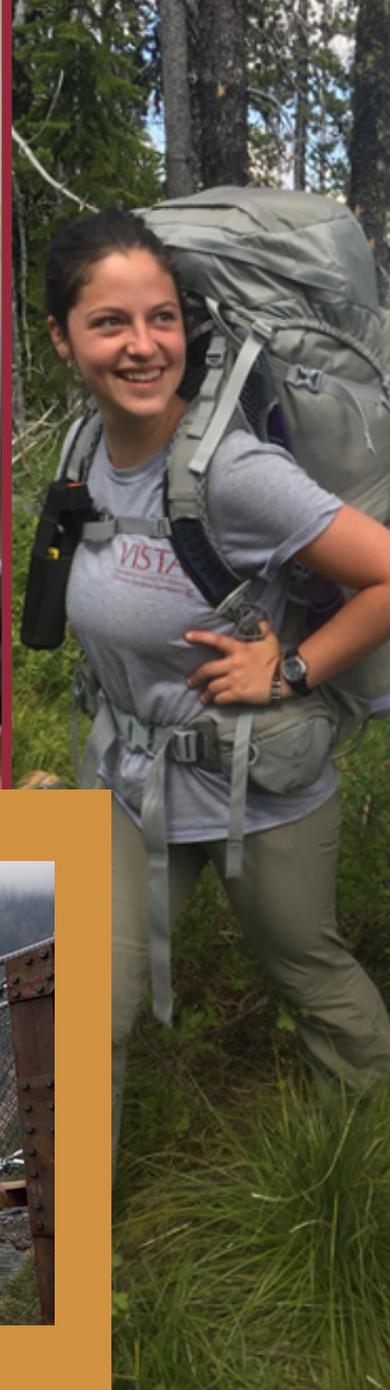
What's the weather like?

“Hot, cold, and everything in-between” is the most succinct description of the weather in Montana. Predominantly, winters are cold and snowy, while summers are hot and dry. Weather can vary dramatically based on region and elevation, so it’s best to look into particular communities for yourself.

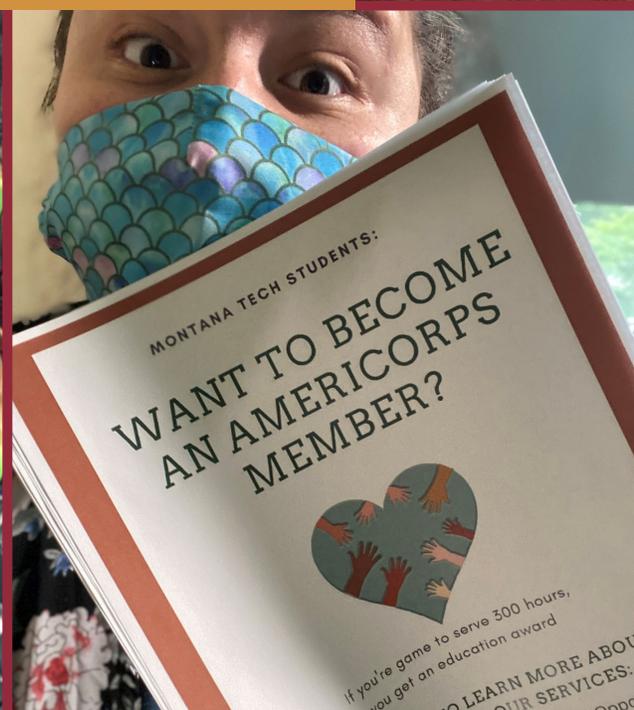
Is Montana as beautiful as they say?

You be the judge...





"I serve because I never know where it will take me next."



MONTANA TECH STUDENTS:
**WANT TO BECOME
AN AMERICORPS
MEMBER?**



If you're game to serve 300 hours,
you get an education award

LEARN MORE ABOUT
OUR SERVICES: