Letter from the Commissioner

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your commitment and partnership in serving Rhode Island, and thank you for taking the time to read and understand ServeRI’s State Service Plan.

Over the past eight months, we gathered public input through a variety of methods, including a survey, focus groups, and public meetings to hear directly from you about how to best leverage national service programs and local volunteers to meet the needs of Rhode Island. You will see in the statement of principles that we greatly value public input, and we invite your continued collaboration as we seek to achieve the priorities identified through this process.

Since 1994 the service commission has led 7,500 AmeriCorps members of all ages and backgrounds to complete 11 million volunteer hours, providing environmental education, increasing access to affordable housing, and supporting children's success in school. On July 1, 2018, that longstanding commitment took on a new, fresh approach. The General Assembly and Governor Gina Raimondo reorganized the service commission to be affiliated with the Rhode Island Department of Education. The service commission has hit the restart button with newly appointed Commission members, new grantmaking policies and monitoring systems, and new projects.

Our first strategic State Service Plan reflects both the history and regrowth of the new ServeRI. ServeRI shares with the Rhode Island Department of Education a vision for Rhode Island that embraces accountability, collaboration, and high expectations for all. Within the State Service Plan are progress measures that will be reported at service commission meetings, opportunities for collaboration, and steps to improve national service programs and reach more Rhode Island students and families.

This is an exciting time for service in Rhode Island. We sincerely thank the Strategic Planning Committee for their time and effort as well as many of you who took the time to provide feedback along the way. Together, we will continue to serve, support, and improve Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Education
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Rhode Island’s Plan at a Glance

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Catalyze inclusive, equitable service opportunities to strengthen Rhode Island.

**Guiding Principles**

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**Funding Priorities**

Education

Health

Economic Opportunity

**Operational Priorities**

Priority #1: Grow the investment of national service in Rhode Island.

Priority #2: Increase the number of Rhode Islanders applying to volunteer with national service programs.

Priority #3: Promote volunteerism and leadership among Rhode Islanders through service and civic reflection.
ServeRI Operational Priorities Visualized

The graphic below visualizes ServeRI’s Operational Priorities, as a visible target for the daily activities of staff and efforts of Commission members.
ServeRI Strategic Planning Members

Chair

- Brian Darrow, Chief of Staff, Rhode Island Department of Education

Commission Members

- Susan Cheesman, Northeast Senior Portfolio Manager, Office of Regional Operations, Corporation for National and Community Service
- Jessica Brown, K12 Design Fellow, Hasso Plattner Institute of Design+
- Gianna C. DeLuca, Executive Assistant, Community Action Partnership of Providence
- Daniela Fairchild, Director, Rhode Island Office of Innovation*
- Kimberly Fernandez, Executive Director, Federal Hill House Association
- Carlon Howard, Chief Impact Officer, Equity Institute
- Keith Oliveira, Executive Director, Rhode Island League of Charter Schools
- Taino Palermo, Director, Community Development, Roger Williams University**
- Kyla Pecchia, Executive Director, Millennial RI+
- Arthur Plitt, President, Neighborhood Alliance of Pawtucket
- Janice Pothier Pac, Director of Volunteer Engagement, United Way of Rhode Island
- Kayla Rosen, Policy Director, Rhode Island Children's Cabinet*
- Edward Ross, General Manager, athenahealth*
- Elaine Ruggieri, Education Consultant+
- Marisa Petreccia, Chief of Staff, Rhode Island Department of Human Services+

Facilitation and Technical Assistance

- Kristin Lehoullier, Facilitator, Elevated Results Consulting, Inc.
- Cathy Saunders, Program Development and Training Consultant

Staff (Rhode Island Department of Education)

- Adam Donaldson, National and Community Service Program Specialist
- Amanda Forget, National and Community Service Program Associate
- David Sienko, Director, Student Community and Academic Supports

* = member of the commission’s Strategic Planning Workgroup
+ = former commission member
Process (April 2019 – February 2020)

**Step 1: Conducting a Public Needs Assessment**

ServeRI launched the strategic planning process in Spring 2019 with two public input surveys - one for residents of Rhode Island and another for non-profit organizations - along with a review of 12 existing needs assessments and strategic plans developed by other organizations (see Appendix for a list of the needs assessments and strategic plans that were reviewed).

More than 450 people across two dozen RI cities and towns and 101 representatives of non-profit organizations (50% located in Providence) completed the survey, responding to questions that explored stakeholder perceptions regarding:

- The biggest community service and volunteerism needs among Rhode Island communities.
- How volunteers have the greatest impact.
- The populations that are the most underserved in Rhode Island.
- Opportunities to leverage national service that further advance other government and community initiatives already underway.
- Community awareness of opportunities to volunteer in national service programs or develop new national service programs.
In addition, ServeRI hosted four focus groups targeting ServeRI sub-grantees, older adults, Rhode Island Department of Education staff, and geographic representation from rural counties, exploring the same questions. Focus groups and the survey were conducted in both English and Spanish languages.

The data gathered during the needs assessment was used in the development of this plan and to inform additional planning such as the Supplemental State Service Plan for Age 55 and Older.

**Step 2: Developing the Mission, Principles, and Priorities**

To guide the process, the Strategic Planning Workgroup articulated a mission and guiding principles for ServeRI and its work. A mission defines what an organization or group is currently doing and why it is important. Guiding principles are ideas or beliefs that guide the organization in all circumstances, regardless of changes in its goals, strategies, type of work, or leadership. Every priority and strategy in this plan should be aligned with these principles. In addition, the Workgroup considered input and feedback from stakeholders to inform the development of a set of funding priorities and three overarching organizational priorities.

To gather feedback on the mission, guiding principles, and priorities, the Workgroup invited the public to attend a ServeRI Commission meeting on September 24, 2019, and engaged participants in an interactive review and critique of the draft statements. More than 30 stakeholders participated.

**Step 3: Identifying Strategies and Progress Measures**

For each priority, the Workgroup developed one or more indicators of progress and a set of supporting strategies. The Workgroup included a Supplemental Plan for Older Adults, as required by federal legislation. At an open meeting of the Commission on December 10, 2019, ServeRI reviewed proposed strategies and progress measures, considering what strategies would result in the most progress on the priorities and whether each strategy required resources beyond the current capacity of ServeRI.

**Step 4: Putting Together the Final Plan**

The Strategic Planning Workgroup and ServeRI Commissioners finalized the Plan by refining the mission, guiding principles, priorities and strategies based on stakeholder feedback and discussion to ensure clarity, consistency, and viability across the Plan.
About ServeRI

ServeRI, Rhode Island’s Commission for National and Community Service, catalyzes inclusive, equitable service opportunities to strengthen Rhode Island by directing national service resources and volunteers to evidence-based programs that make a measurable impact in education, health, housing, and other social services. Service and volunteer programs do more than move communities forward; they serve the participants by providing pathways to new career and leadership opportunities. National service places hundreds of adults each year into intensive service positions in Rhode Island where they learn valuable work skills, earn money for education, and develop a life-long commitment to active citizenship.

History and Purpose

A Rhode Island Commission for National and Community Service was first created on November 11, 1993 by the Executive Order of Governor Bruce Sundlun to promote civic participation among Rhode Islanders and administer the federal programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Legislation from the Rhode Island General Assembly followed to structure the service commission as an independent nonprofit organization that would later rebrand as Serve Rhode Island and merge with the Volunteer Center of Rhode Island in 2009. The nonprofit Serve Rhode Island ceased operations in 2018, and the General Assembly with Governor Gina Raimondo reauthorized the state commission to be housed and supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education (PL 2017 ch 395).
From the start, state leaders described the purpose of a commission to promote the capability of Rhode Island’s people and communities to work collaboratively for the long-term prosperity of the state. They shared a vision with federal legislators that volunteerism is integral to democratic society. Therefore, the state commission has sought to build community-based organizations’ capacity through national service programs and volunteers; address the needs identified by local communities; develop collaborative leaders by infusing service with learning; and bring together people of all backgrounds, abilities, and beliefs to experience accomplishing volunteer projects together.

Over the past 25 years, ServeRI has led 7,500 AmeriCorps members of all ages and backgrounds to complete 11 million volunteer hours, earning Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than $25.5 million.

The service commission has a record of catalyzing national service to support youth development, literacy, and STEAM education through AmeriCorps programs like City Year Rhode Island, Providence Children’s MuseumCorps, and formerly the Ocean State Environmental Education Collaborative (OSEEC). Many Rhode Islanders are likely to remember popular programs like VolunCheers volunteer recognition, residential snow removal for the elderly and disabled, a volunteer matching website, Earth Day Service in Roger Williams Park, and training community organizations in accessible and inclusive volunteer and staff management.
ServeRI Today

Rhode Island ranks 7th among all states in producing AmeriCorps members per capita and Providence ranks 2nd among small cities. From the Rhode Island Department of Education, dedicated national and community service program staff provide technical assistance to community organizations, schools, and local government agencies to increase the impact of AmeriCorps and develop new national service programs for Rhode Island. ServeRI’s 2019-2020 grant portfolio of 10 AmeriCorps programs directly benefits more than 16,000 students in Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket through literacy and math instruction, out-of-school programs, school attendance initiatives, and college advising, in addition to helping families across the state with food and housing.

ServeRI is guided by the leadership of Commission Members appointed by the Governor who use their skills and expertise to award and administer Rhode Island’s national service funding and heighten public awareness of volunteer opportunities throughout the state through volunteer recognition programs, public service announcements, and service day events. As a young commission administered under the Rhode Island Department of Education, ServeRI also looks inward to building its own policies and procedures to effectively steward public funds and ensure continuity of operations.

Each year, ServeRI invites AmeriCorps members to a series of five civic reflection workshops called Justice Talks. This signature program challenges members to understand their individual values, motivations, and public commitments, developing imaginative, national service and community leaders for Rhode Island’s future.

Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service 2020
Hope High School, Providence, RI
National Service Partners
Among the many partners supporting ServeRI, there are three mission-critical collaborating organizations.

America’s Service Commissions
ServeRI is strongly supported by other state commissions through America’s Service Commissions, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing and promoting state service commissions across the United States and territories. America’s Service Commissions has helped to build the capacity of ServeRI and its grantees, as well as grow support for national service among public leaders. Learn more at www.statecommissions.org.

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)
The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is the federal agency responsible for improving lives, strengthening communities, and fostering civic engagement through service and volunteering. In addition to awarding formula and competitive grant funds to ServeRI, CNCS is a strategic partner in developing the capacity of community organizations and volunteers to help Rhode Island residents. CNCS operates from Washington, DC, as well as from the Northeast Region Office in Concord, NH, which manages the AmeriCorps VISTA and Senior Corps programs in Rhode Island. The CNCS federal investment of nearly $7 million in Rhode Island last year supported 365 AmeriCorps members and 2,774 Senior Corps volunteers. Learn more at www.nationalservice.gov.

United Way of Rhode Island
The Volunteer Center of the United Way of Rhode Island is an important local partner in promoting civic participation through corporate and individual volunteerism. Nonprofit organizations seeking volunteers can advertise opportunities at volunteer.uwri.org, a platform developed by the state commission and enhanced by the United Way to help thousands of Rhode Islanders volunteer each year.
Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Input

More than 450 people responded to the surveys or participated in a focus group that explored their perceptions regarding how national service and volunteerism can address community needs, their awareness of national service programs operating in Rhode Island, and potential barriers to expanding national service in Rhode Island. Below is a summary of the most commonly mentioned themes.

The Most Urgent Needs in Rhode Island

Stakeholders were asked questions about what they thought were the most urgent needs in Rhode Island.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Safe and Affordable Housing</td>
<td>Safe and affordable housing was the highest need ranked in the survey and among some of the focus groups. Some respondents were most concerned about safe and affordable housing for specific populations such as older adults or veterans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mental Health Services</td>
<td>Survey respondents identified mental health services as a close second urgent need. All focus groups raised mental health service – connecting it with opioid and substance abuse prevention and raising the mental health of children in addition to adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. K-12 Education</td>
<td>Education themes were identified third in the survey and in three of the four focus groups. The areas mentioned most frequently were: Early education so that children read on grade level in 3rd grade; high-quality after-school and community programs for kids; and supports for multilingual learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Racial Equity</td>
<td>Racial equity was a recurring theme in focus groups and the public review of the initial draft plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other areas of concern raised during the needs assessment</td>
<td>Programs to reduce homelessness, poverty, and unemployment among veterans were in the top four most urgent needs among survey participants. Survey respondents also identified the following populations in most need: differently abled individuals; older adults; children &amp; youth - ages 6-26, and recent immigrants. Transportation for older adults and suburban/rural residents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Where AmeriCorps Members and Volunteers Can Have the Most Impact

Participants and survey respondents were asked where they thought national service or long-term volunteers could have the most impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. K-12 Education</td>
<td>Education was identified as the area in which national service and volunteerism can have the most impact. The specific education area identified most frequently as having the highest potential to be improved by volunteers was achieving grade-level reading by 3rd grade. Second was high-quality after-school and community programs for kids. Third was support for students to enroll in and complete higher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Safe and Affordable Housing</td>
<td>The theme of safe and affordable housing was raised as an area of potential impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mental Health Services</td>
<td>Helping to provide access to mental health services was identified third as a potential area for high impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other areas for potential impact</td>
<td>Focus group participants raised the following additional areas: Community voice and organizing for changes in government; programs to reduce homelessness, poverty, and unemployment among veterans; and job training programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Areas least likely for volunteers/national service to make impact</td>
<td>There was not a consensus across groups about the area(s) least likely for national service to make an impact. However, the following were ranked low by the focus groups and survey respondents: Healthy farming and food systems for good nutrition; disaster preparedness for households, businesses, and communities; and clean and safe outdoor public spaces and waterways.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Barriers and Supports to Program Development**

Stakeholders were asked for questions about possible barriers and potential supports needed for national service to grow in Rhode Island. Key themes were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Burden</td>
<td>Organizations mentioned the many compliance expectations of national service as a burden. In the words of one survey respondent, “Went to an informational session at ServeRI, but the grant is too complex for my agency to manage.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant Capacity</td>
<td>Size was mentioned as another burden. Some programs mentioned not having the personnel to supervise members, not having the financial systems for a federal grant, or not having data collection and evaluation capacity in their organizations. Others expressed concern that national service programs require large teams of AmeriCorps members, “I do not need a whole team of people; could use a couple.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Match Funding Requirements</td>
<td>Some organizations expressed that the reason they do not apply for AmeriCorps grants is an inability to fundraise the required 24-50% budget match. Suggested supports that could enable more organizations to apply for grants were: The state could provide funding toward the program in addition to the federal money, and collaborating with other state agencies to provide resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Application Priorities</td>
<td>There were concerns that if ServeRI restricts eligibility for grants to a priority need, geography, or grant type potential applicants could be excluded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training &amp; Technical Assistance (TTA)</td>
<td>Some expressed that the application process should include more technical assistance and that once awarded a grant, ServeRI Training &amp; Technical Assistance is essential. Survey respondents felt that ServeRI had a role in supporting organizations (with or without AmeriCorps programs) to have strong volunteer programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Asked what the state government can do to increase applicants to service programs and volunteerism in Rhode Island, the straight forward response was “better advertisement.” There is a low level of awareness of opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Living</td>
<td>The cost of living was identified as the top reason for decreasing numbers of applicants to national service programs. There were many suggestions for additional incentives for service participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ServeRI Mission

ServeRI envisions a time when everyone has the opportunity to volunteer in Rhode Island. For the State Service Plan 2020-2023, the Commission members sought to construct a mission statement that spoke to ServeRI’s core purpose in nine words or less. Commission members dismissed variations that did not encompass all populations and organizations in Rhode Island and chose to highlight the guiding principles inclusion and equity.

Catalyze inclusive, equitable service opportunities to strengthen Rhode Island.
Guiding Principles

ServeRI developed the following set of principles to guide the strategy and practice of the commission. Whereas practices may change, ServeRI views these principles as fixed, basic truths. They inspire the strategies and activities. No matter the conditions of ServeRI’s environment, and no matter how complex and challenging its strategic goals, the principles below are permanent. They are meant to guide ServeRI staff and Commission Members toward the right decisions, practices, and processes.

LEADERSHIP
Civic reflection and service-learning experiences stimulate lifelong community engagement. Bringing people together to think and talk deeply about their civic choices, personal values, and public commitments strengthens their relationships and stimulates leaders to be able to respond more imaginatively to a community’s challenges and opportunities.

COLLABORATION
Rhode Island’s uniqueness as the smallest state allows people and organizations to connect, learn, and partner together.

INCLUSION
All individuals and communities have inherent dignity and local strengths to contribute. Achieving inclusion and cultural responsiveness requires empathy, intentional actions, and public input.

EQUITY
Volunteer service can be an opportunity to fill gaps and address disparities that are the result of unequal distribution of power and opportunities. Yet, service itself requires negotiation of the complicated relationship between the person who serves and the individual served.

DATA
Results must be measured to be meaningful. High-quality data is needed to make informed decisions about programs and activities, to hold partners and ourselves accountable to our goals, to tell the story of program achievements, and to add knowledge to the volunteer service field of practice.
Funding Priorities

National service provides two benefits in one—developing the public leadership and job skills of participants and achieving a measurable change for the community served. Each year, ServeRI competes for funding and receives, by population, formula federal funds to subgrant to community organizations and local agencies for the purpose of training and supervising AmeriCorps members in service to strengthen Rhode Island. As a public body of the state, ServeRI strategically aligns AmeriCorps funding and program development with the goals of the Governor and state agencies. After careful review of other agencies’ strategic plans and stakeholder input into the potential for impact by volunteers, ServeRI has identified the following funding priorities to guide grant-funding decisions to ensure that national service resources address priority community needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Service Focus Area</th>
<th>Rhode Island Funding Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td>Improving Academic Success (Math and Reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing College Access and Completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expanding Out of School Time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving School Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving School Culture, Climate, and Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expanding Supports for Multilingual Learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTH</strong></td>
<td>Addressing Mental Health Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preventing Opioid and Substance Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing Access to Quality Health Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY</strong></td>
<td>Expanding Access to Safe and Affordable Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expanding Access to Wrap Around Supports for Job Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving Environmental Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRAM STRUCTURE</strong></td>
<td>Programs with an Intermediary or Collaborative Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programs that Identify and Propose to Address a Root Cause of more than one Priority above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programs that Leverage Additional Resources to Increase Impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operational Priorities

The following priorities reflect three strategically consequential areas of focus that the ServeRI Commission believes will enable ServeRI to achieve its mission. Staff and Commission members will measure progress towards achieving each priority by the identified indicators and direct daily tasks and effort to these strategies.

Priority #1: Grow the investment of national service in Rhode Island.

Indicators

The indicators below will measure our progress towards achieving this priority:

- By 2023, the federal investment of national service in Rhode Island reported on the annual state profile by the Corporation for National and Community Service will have grown from $6,991,883 to $7,691,071 (an increase of 10%).
- By 2023, the total number of current participants in Rhode Island reported on the annual state profile by the Corporation for National and Community Service will grow to 3,500 individuals (an increase of 12%).
- By 2023, at least five new applicants will have submitted full proposals to a ServeRI grant competition.
- Each year for three years, the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps program will complete a project with a Rhode Island organization.
- All 2022 and 2023 continuing grantees will achieve a rating of moderate or low-risk on the ServeRI grant compliance and performance assessment.
- The Rhode Island Department of Education will document $50,000 in local support of ServeRI administration in fiscal year 2021, $75,000 in fiscal year 2022, and $100,000 in fiscal year 2023 (an increase of 100%).
- Between 2020 and 2023, the percent of ServeRI grantees assessed at preliminary or higher on the national service evidence scale will shift from 20% (2 of 10 grantees) to 36% (est. 5 of 14 grantees).

“TOO MANY POTENTIAL SERVICE SITES STILL DO NOT KNOW WHAT AMERICORPS IS.”

- Focus Group Respondent
Strategies

The strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving this priority:

- Engage Commission members and alumni in targeted outreach to Rhode Island organizations about national service grants and programs.
- Collaborate closely with the CNCS Northeast Region Office and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps Mississippi Campus to develop new national service projects.
- Revise the formula funding application to allow for additional flexibility in the requirements.
- Deploy consultants and technologies to expand the capacity of ServeRI to provide technical assistance to AmeriCorps grant applicants so that the quality of proposals submitted for national service funding increases.
- Require grantees to create written plans to improve evidence and support their research, data collection, and evaluation.
- Update pre-award and monitoring procedures to promote strong program practices and performance.
- Increase the percent of local match funding for ServeRI through sponsorships and funds in the state budget.

Priority #2: Increase the number of Rhode Islanders applying to volunteer with national service programs.

Indicators

The indicators below will measure our progress towards achieving this priority:

- The number of applicants to participate in ServeRI AmeriCorps grantee programs will increase from 405 in 2019 to 425 in 2020, 450 in 2021, and more than 500 in 2022.
- Rhode Island will remain in the top 10 states for applicants to AmeriCorps per capita.
- ServeRI will have engaged more than 50 Rhode Island guidance and career counselors by 2023 about the benefits of and process for applying to volunteer in a national service program.
- During the 2021 and 2022 ServeRI AmeriCorps grant competition, the average earned score for recruitment plans will have increased from 2 points to 6 points on a review sheet that totals 100 points.
- During the 2022-2023 grant period, ServeRI will pilot one or more new incentives for national service participants.
- By December 20, 2021, ServeRI will publish a new living allowance policy for AmeriCorps State grantees.
Strategies
The strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving this goal:

- Educate high school and college career counselors on the options for and benefits of pursuing a national service pathway for their students.
- Develop a State Service Commission Disability Engagement Plan, as outlined by the Corporation for National and Community Service, to promote the inclusion of service members of all abilities.
- Build awareness of the transferability of the AmeriCorps education award from members 55 years and older to children and grandchildren.
- Prepare and empower national service members to be recruitment ambassadors and speak about their service experience.
- Revise the grant application review to award higher points to applicants with strong plans to recruit participants from specific populations or demographic communities to reflect whom the program serves.
- Research adding local incentives for service participants, such as business discounts, academic credit, in-state tuition, bus passes, or housing.
- Develop, with national service volunteers, recommendations for an equitable living allowance and other strategies to address cost of living as a barrier to participation in national service programs.
- Maintain affiliation with organizations such as America’s Service Commissions and Service Year who work to raise the profile of AmeriCorps nationally.
- Leverage public awareness efforts of the Corporation for National and Community Service, including AmeriCorps Week and the AmeriCorps PSA video.

“BEING PAID LESS THAN MINIMUM WAGE IS NOT A PATHWAY THAT’S FEASIBLE FOR MANY PEOPLE WHO WOULD OTHERWISE JOIN AMERICORPS.”

During the needs assessment, 63% of survey respondents chose “cost of living” as the barrier to national service participation.
Priority #3: Promote volunteerism and leadership among Rhode Islanders through service and civic reflection.

Indicators
The indicators below will measure our progress towards achieving this priority:

- ServeRI partners will report annually an overall increase in service and volunteerism by adults age 55 and older.
- ServeRI will be awarded a Volunteer Generation Fund grant prior to June 30, 2023.
- The number of community volunteers engaged in ServeRI service events will increase by 10% or more year over year from 2021-2023.
- Each year, more than 65 participants will complete a civic reflection program facilitated by ServeRI.

Strategies
The strategies outlined below articulate our key actions for achieving this goal:

- Support Age Friendly Rhode Island, Senior Corps, and other organizations that engage adults age 55 and over in service and reduce barriers to volunteerism.
- Apply for a Volunteer Generation Fund grant from CNCS to increase the capacity of Rhode Island community organizations to recruit and manage volunteers.
- Engage the public in planned National Service Days.
- Facilitate a civic reflection curriculum for AmeriCorps members (e.g., Justice Talks) and promote civic reflection resources to other service and volunteer programs.
- Work within the Rhode Island Department of Education to develop a service-learning teacher recognition program and resources for service-learning.
- Explore potential connection between national service and the high school diploma Public Service Pathway Endorsement program or “Silver Cord” program.
- Sponsor and support existing K-12 civic leadership and service learning efforts (such as Civics Day).
Supplemental Plan for Rhode Islanders Age 55 and Older

ServeRI has developed a set of additional strategies to increase volunteerism and national service opportunities for adults age 55 and older. Compared to the average state, Rhode Island has a higher percentage of older adults and the population is growing rapidly. Not only can communities benefit by harnessing the skills of older adults, but also volunteer activity has proven health benefits by decreasing isolation and increasing physical activity for older adults. Through collaboration with community-based organizations, the Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging, Age Friendly Rhode Island, AARP Rhode Island, and the Corporation for National and Community Service, ServeRI will pursue the following strategies as a supplement to the State Service Plan.

- Support the growth of Senior Corps programs, including the state’s goal to increase the number of male Senior Companions by 200 percent – with a focus on veterans.
- Seek opportunities to recognize volunteers age 55+.
- Distribute information to older adults on the health benefits of volunteering.
- Partner with organizations currently serving Rhode Islanders 55+, as well as those that currently recruit and engage Rhode Islanders 55+ as volunteers, to recruit and develop additional opportunities to serve.
- Train existing AmeriCorps programs on how best to recruit and support in service Rhode Islanders age 55+.
- Consider the use of 55+ volunteers and multi-generational service activities as a priority for AmeriCorps funding decisions in support of other funding priorities.
- Partner with the Northeast Region Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service to increase cross-training and event participation across AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs in Rhode Island.
- Promote service-learning projects that partner adults 55+ with younger AmeriCorps members or students to address community problems.
- Maintain a representative on the state commission board from a community organization serving older adults.
### Federal National Service Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps</td>
<td>AmeriCorps is a national network of programs that engages more than 75,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet critical needs in communities throughout the nation. AmeriCorps offers several ways to get involved, from part-time local service programs to full-time residential programs. Members receive guidance and training so they can make a contribution that suits their talents, interests, and availability. Successful programs perform a dual role: 1) utilize service as a strategy to meet community needs and 2) support the development and growth of the AmeriCorps members serving with the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps State</td>
<td>AmeriCorps State designates AmeriCorps programs under the direct management of ServeRI, the state service commission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation for National and Community Service</td>
<td>Also known as “The Corporation” or CNCS, the Corporation for National and Community Service was established in 1993 as a federal agency responsible for improving lives, strengthening communities, and fostering civic engagement through service and volunteering. CNCS serves millions of individuals of all ages and backgrounds to help meet local needs through a wide array of service opportunities. These include projects in six priority areas: disaster services, economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship, healthy futures, and veterans and military families through CNCS’s core programs: AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the Volunteer Generation Fund.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Corps</td>
<td>Senior Corps connects older volunteers, aged 55+, with the people and organizations that need them most. Grants administered through Senior Corps provide funding to Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and Senior Companions. Foster Grandparents are role models, mentors, and friends to children with exceptional needs. Retired Senior Volunteer Program, or RSVP, is a general effort to match older adults with a variety of service opportunities. Senior Companions are volunteers age 55 and over who make a difference by providing assistance and friendship to adults who have difficulty with daily tasks,</td>
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</table>
such as shopping or paying bills. Volunteers help these adults remain independent in their homes instead of having to move to more costly institutional care. Senior Companions give families or professional caregivers much-needed time off from their duties, run errands, and often provide friendship for their clients.

Volunteer Generation Fund

The Volunteer Generation Fund is a program authorized by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act to support voluntary organizations and state service commissions in boosting the impact of volunteers in addressing critical community needs. Fund investments focus on volunteer management practices that increase both volunteer recruitment and retention. Retention is key to ensuring that volunteers are productively engaged and to bringing stability to nonprofit operations. The Fund also supports efforts that build the career skills of volunteers, expanding opportunity for the unemployed, veterans, and disadvantaged youth.

Terms Used in the State Service Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps member</td>
<td>An individual who volunteers through an AmeriCorps grant-funded program. The term “member” instead of participant or volunteer is used most commonly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Reflection</td>
<td>According to the Center for Civic Reflection, civic reflection refers to any activity that engages people in thinking carefully about their civic choices and commitments. Additionally, there are five common characteristics of civic reflection activities:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. <strong>Reflective.</strong> We ask open-ended, exploratory questions that focus less on &quot;When is this going to get done?&quot; and more on &quot;Why are we doing what we’re doing?&quot; and &quot;What does it mean?&quot; We value reflection for its own sake.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. <strong>Deep.</strong> Civic reflection goes deeper to explore our values, choices, beliefs, assumptions and commitments. We focus on questions that rumble around underneath our work but that</td>
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</table>

ServeRI
Rhode Island Department of Education
we may not know how to discuss comfortably with one another.

3. **Object-driven.** The object—whether it is a reading or an image, a video or a song—serves as an anchor, as the thing that creates a shared experience. The object is thought-provoking, complex, and raises foundational questions about our action in the world.

4. **Questioning.** We explore questions, together, in order to deepen understanding, build relationships, spur creativity and imagination, and get everyone involved.

5. **Inclusive.** We believe people are thoughtful by nature and want to be heard. But we rarely ask people to be thoughtful in their roles as citizens. Civic reflection discussions are about listening to and learning from all voices, not just the experts.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Commission</th>
<th>A public commission is a group of people assigned a particular government function or set of responsibilities defined in legislation. ServeRI is the brand name for Rhode Island’s Commission for National and Community Service.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td>Smaller organizations and local governments may have limited capacity to successfully apply for and implement an AmeriCorps grant, due to the high level of organizational capacity required of eligible applicants or the lack of available matching funds. Thus, it may be effective for a single eligible applicant (an intermediary) to develop an application and oversee the implementation of an AmeriCorps program that engages multiple nonprofits and partners (a consortium) that, individually, do not have the necessary organizational or fundraising capacity to apply for and run an AmeriCorps program. Given the desire to address community needs holistically, the applicants that make up the consortium may have but are not required to have different service activities and outcomes (multi-focused). The activities provided by the consortium must collectively address a compelling community need or set of needs and the intermediary must have sufficient financial and management capacity to act as an umbrella organization for the consortia.</td>
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</table>
**Service-Learning**

ServeRI distinguishes some activities as service-learning when students of any age address human and community needs as part of a formal education program. The experience is led by a teacher, structured with opportunities for reflection, and designed to achieve learning outcomes.

**Volunteer vs. National Service vs. Service**

A “volunteer” is an individual who offers help without compensation, giving their time and talent to benefit individuals and communities. Community-based organizations frequently recruit one-time or ongoing help from volunteers, and in this document, the word “volunteer” is used most frequently to identify these privately organized activities. The words “national” and “service” are used in combination to describe an ongoing, volunteer activity sponsored by a government program, such as AmeriCorps or Senior Corps. When ServeRI uses the term “service,” it is an umbrella term meant to include the whole spectrum of private volunteer and public national service activities.
Appendix

Review of External Organizations’ Needs Assessments and Strategic Plans

Seeking to understand the unmet needs of Rhode Islanders and the priorities of state agencies and partners, the Rhode Island Commission for National and Community Service began with a review of published needs assessments and strategic plans. In general, what emerges is a State concerned about the quality of its education system and the link between education and careers. A State seeking to protect and leverage for growth its nickname—the Ocean State. And, a State concerned that many families struggle with access to nutritious food and safe and affordable housing. Woven throughout these priorities is attention to disparities in academic, health, and social outcomes for people of color in Rhode Island.

Documents Reviewed

- Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2017 Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children
- The Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet’s Strategic Plan 2015-2020
- Rhode Island Department of Education’s 2020 Vision for Education
- Sailing Ahead: Strategic Plan for Postsecondary Education (2015-2020)
- Rhode Island Association of Community Action Agencies’ 2017 Community Needs Assessment
- Rhode Island Community Food Bank Strategic Plan
- Age Friendly RI Strategic Plan 2016: Building an Age Friendly Community
- Division of Elderly Affairs State Plan on Aging
- GrowSmartRI Strategic Plan 2015-2019
- Rhode Island Strategic Plan On Addiction And Overdose
- Rhode Island Office of Veterans Affairs Annual Report 2018
Reflections and Notes