

FOODCORPS FINANCIAL GUIDE



FoodCorps offers you a unique and transformative service experience.

You'll make a measurable difference in the lives of your students, while gaining professional skills and becoming part a network of changemakers that will continue to grow beyond your time with FoodCorps.

AS AN AMERICORPS SERVICE MEMBER WITH FOODCORPS, YOU WILL BE ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS:

- Up to \$18,250 living allowance (paid in 25 bi-weekly payments throughout your service term)
- \$5,815 AmeriCorps Segal Education Award, which can help pay for future schooling or repay qualified student loans. You will earn this upon successful completion of 1700 service hours
- Student loan forbearance for eligible federal loans
- Health insurance with premiums paid by FoodCorps
- Partial childcare reimbursements (please see eligibility requirements).
- You may also be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps, based on your total income.

This document includes more information about AmeriCorps service member benefits, as well as resources to help you manage living on the stipend.

The Stipend

As an AmeriCorps member with FoodCorps, you receive a \$18,250 living allowance over the course of your 11 and a half months of service. The stipend is:

- Paid bi-weekly
- Before taxes

Living on a stipend can be challenging, but it's definitely possible. Securing affordable housing, applying for SNAP, and getting qualified student loans placed in forbearance can all help you manage your finances during your service year.

Housing

Service Members are responsible for securing their own housing. Housing costs can be a major challenge when living on a stipend. If you are relocating for service, be sure to start looking for housing you can afford early. You may want to consider being roommates with other service members who will have similar budget restrictions. You can contact the Fellow in your state to get in touch with other FoodCorps service members in your area, or email serve@foodcorps.org.



AirBnB Voucher

Service members may also be eligible for a one-time \$750 AirBnB voucher to temporarily assist with housing in a new city. Eligible service members are those relocating to the following cities with FoodCorps service sites:

Los Angeles, CA
San Francisco, CA
Washington, DC
Boston, MA
Detroit, MI
New York City, NY
Portland, OR

In order to complete the request form, you will have to create a profile on ServiceYear.org. Once you have created a profile, you should email Recruitment Coordinator MJ Santiago at serve@foodcorps.org in order to be officially “enrolled” in the Service Year Exchange system. Then, you can complete the voucher request form. You can find more information about the vouchers at:

<https://serviceyear.org/airbnb/>

Vouchers are awarded competitively. To increase your chance of receiving a voucher, you should apply as soon as possible after accepting your FoodCorps service position. If you are awarded a voucher, you must reserve your AirBnB within **two weeks**.

SNAP

AmeriCorps service members may also be eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps. SNAP eligibility is determined based on your total household income. The AmeriCorps living stipend *does not* count towards your total income when determining SNAP eligibility. Depending on your total income and available resources, you may be qualified for SNAP benefits even if you have another source of income or live with a partner with a source of income.

You can determine SNAP eligibility by visiting this site: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligibility> or completing the online pre-screening here: <https://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/> There is no penalty or fee for applying, so consider applying even if you are not sure if you are eligible.

Before completing the SNAP application as an AmeriCorps service member you will need to obtain a letter certifying you are an active service member, and that your living allowance should not be counted towards your total income. A hard copy of this letter will be included with your orientation packet in August, and digital copies will be made available to you as needed throughout the service term..

Each state has its own application form and process for applying for SNAP benefits. Some states have an online application, while others require the form to be filled out on paper and returned by mail or in-person. Individual state forms can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply>.

After submitting an application, you will be contacted for an interview. The interview will take place either over the phone or in person. During this interview, you will be asked to verify information you provided on your application, and may be asked for additional proof (such as bank statements). Be sure to have your financial documents (such as bank statements, paystubs, retirement or invest statements, and the AmeriCorps certification letter) ready before your interview.

If you are determined to be eligible for SNAP benefits, you will receive an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card that functions like a credit or debit card. Your SNAP benefits will be automatically deposited to the EBT card every month. EBT cards can be used at most stores that sell food.

SNAP benefits can be used for:

- Most food items at grocery stores
- Some food items at farmers markets (in some cities), gas stations, and convenience stores, and pharmacies
- Some cold prepared food items, such as pre-made sandwiches at grocery stores
- Plants and seeds that grow food for your household to eat

SNAP benefits cannot be used for:

- Any non-food item, such as pet foods; soaps, paper products, and household supplies; grooming items, toothpaste, and cosmetics
- Alcoholic beverages and tobacco
- Vitamins and medicines
- Any food that will be eaten in the store
- Hot foods

Important information about SNAP benefits:

- SNAP benefits will roll over from month to month
- Sales tax cannot be charged on items bought with SNAP benefits
- When applying for SNAP, households may have up to \$2,250 in “countable resources,” (which includes money in a bank account) or \$3,250 in countable resources if an individual in the household is 60 years or older, or is disabled.
 - Home and land are **not** considered resources for SNAP eligibility
 - Most retirement plans are **not** considered resources for SNAP eligibility

Additional information about SNAP can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/facts-about-snap>

Information about applications for SNAP by state can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply>

Information on SNAP eligibility for AmeriCorps members can be found here: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/guidance-from-office-general-counsel/food-stamp-eligibility>

Segal AmeriCorps Education Award

FoodCorps service members are eligible to receive the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award after successfully completing the terms of their service. The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award can be used to pay educational costs, or to repay qualified student loans. For the 2017-2018 program year, the award is **\$5,815** for those who have completed a full year of service.

AmeriCorps members can only earn the value of two full-time Education Awards. FoodCorps service members who have already completed two or more full-time service years are not eligible to receive the award.

Facts to be aware of about the education award:

- The award can only be used on qualified loans or educational expenses as determined by AmeriCorps.
- The award must be used within seven years from the date it is awarded
- The award can be divided up and used at different times for different authorized expenses.
- The award is non-transferable except by qualified senior citizens to their children or grandchildren.
- Interest payments and loan payments made using the award are considered taxable income by the IRS
- Many post-secondary institutions will “match” the amount of an award paid towards qualified degrees.

More information about the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award can be found here:

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps/alumni/segal-amicorps-education-award>

Loan Forbearance and Interest Payments

As a FoodCorps service member, you may be eligible to postpone payment on federally guaranteed student loans by having them put in forbearance. When loans are in forbearance, your loan payments will be postponed until you have completed your term of service. Loan forbearance requests can be completed through your My AmeriCorps account (<https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do>).

Interest accrues while loans are in forbearance, however when you have completed your term of service you will be eligible to have interest paid by The Office of the National Service Trust. Interest payment requests are also completed using your My AmeriCorps account.

Additional information and instructions on how to apply for loan forbearance and interest payments using your My AmeriCorps profile can be found here: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps/segal-amicorps-education-award/using-your-segal-education-award/postponing>

Childcare Reimbursement

FoodCorps service members may be eligible to apply for AmeriCorps child care benefits. Detailed information about AmeriCorps child care benefits can be found here: <https://www.americorpschildcare.com/>

Both the service member and child care provider need to apply in order for the child care provider to receive payment. The applications can be accessed on the AmeriCorps Child Care website, and can be completed online or via mail.

Service Member Eligibility

To qualify for the child care benefit, the member must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- The service member's household income must not exceed 75% of the state's median income for a family of the same size; this limit is different for each state and may change annually (see table below). The total household income used to determine your income eligibility **does not include** your AmeriCorps stipend.
- The member must not currently receive a child care subsidy from another source at the time of acceptance into the program (including a parent or guardian) which would continue to be provided while the member serves in the program.
- The member must be the parent or legal guardian of a child under the age of 13.
- The child must reside with the member. The member must certify that he or she needs child care in order to participate in the AmeriCorps State and National program.

There is no penalty or fee for applying, so consider applying even if you are not sure if you are eligible based on income.

Child Care Provider Eligibility

Child care benefits are paid to qualified child care providers for all or of part of the member's child care costs during their active time of service with AmeriCorps. Child care subsidy benefits are paid directly to qualified child care providers. Regulations vary by state and are subject to change annually. For all states, child care providers:

- must be at least 18 years of age;
- may not live in the same household as the member; and
- may not be the child's biological, step, or adoptive parent, or the child's legal guardian, adult acting in loco parentis, or the spouse of a legal guardian or adult acting in loco parentis.

Other state guidelines for child care providers can be found here: <https://www.americorpschildcare.com/index.cfm?tab5>

75% of Median Household Income by State

	1 Person Households	2 Person Households	3 Person Households	4 Person Households
Arizona	\$21,660.00	\$44,385.75	\$48,403.50	\$53,792.25
Arkansas	\$16,441.50	\$36,344.25	\$41,913.75	\$48,557.25
California	\$26,298.00	\$54,093.00	\$58,306.50	\$63,627.75
Connecticut	\$26,336.25	\$60,909.00	\$68,310.00	\$83,208.75
Georgia	\$21,738.75	\$42,591.75	\$46,659.00	\$54,551.25
Hawaii	\$27,146.25	\$53,977.50	\$65,218.50	\$72,711.00
Iowa	\$20,752.50	\$46,813.50	\$52,647.75	\$60,867.00
Maine	\$18,127.50	\$45,224.25	\$51,985.50	\$59,136.00
Massachusetts	\$24,696.75	\$59,214.75	\$71,055.75	\$83,739.00
Michigan	\$20,398.50	\$43,106.25	\$50,657.25	\$59,448.75
Mississippi	\$15,725.25	\$35,310.00	\$38,535.00	\$45,611.25
Montana	\$18,904.50	\$42,803.25	\$47,055.75	\$58,890.00
New Jersey	\$26,149.50	\$57,621.75	\$71,124.00	\$83,314.50
New Mexico	\$17,982.00	\$42,416.25	\$42,011.25	\$44,943.00
New York	\$23,880.75	\$51,513.75	\$58,254.75	\$68,064.00
North Carolina	\$19,629.75	\$41,722.50	\$47,865.75	\$53,340.00
Oregon	\$21,123.00	\$45,796.50	\$52,528.50	\$58,159.50
Washington, DC	\$38,724.75	\$78,990.00	\$74,421.00	\$84,134.25

*Information from <https://censusreporter.org>. States may calculate Median Household Income differently.

Budgeting

Even with SNAP benefits and student loan forbearance, living on a stipend can be challenging. One important step you can take to managing your stipend is to create a budget early on. You can use online budgeting tools or use old-school pencil and paper.

When creating your budget, your first step is to determine your monthly income after taxes (remember, the stipend is before taxes). Your income after taxes will vary depending on your state, filing status, and other factors, but you can get a rough idea by using an online paycheck estimator, such as Paycheck City: <https://www.paycheckcity.com/calculator/salary/>

Once you have an estimate of your post-tax income, create a list of essentials. Essentials are expenses you know you will need whose cost will be roughly the same month to month. Essentials may include:

- Groceries
- Housing
- Basic utilities
- Transportation (including car payments, bus passes, car insurance, etc)
- Child care

Once you know what your essential monthly expenses are, you can figure out what you have left for non-essentials like entertainment. Below are a few articles which include ways AmeriCorps service members in other programs have budgeted their stipends. Common tips for low-cost fun include hosting potlucks or game nights (which can be a great way to connect with fellow service members), and looking for days when museums admission is free or discounted.

Online Budgeting Tools:

- Mint.com
- Goodbudget.com

Blog posts and interviews about living on a stipend:

- <http://ngsmovement.org/2014/11/15/10-tips-for-living-on-a-stipend/>
- <http://readingpartners.org/blog/ameri-corps-stipend-living/>
- <http://idealistcareers.org/how-i-manage-my-money-ameri-corps-edition/>
- <https://www.cityyear.org/blog/real-talk-how-live-city-year-stipend>