

Alpine Achievers Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions for
YMHC Student Engagement Specialist AmeriCorps
Applicants



What is the region like?

The San Luis Valley (SLV) is a large, wide-open, alpine (elevation 7,500 ft) valley in Southern Colorado. It is beautiful and very rural. To the northeast lies the Arkansas River Valley. Towns in both valleys tend to be small (all have fewer than 20,000 people, some as few as 300 people) and they're spread out by an hour or more in driving time. Each town has a unique culture, political climate, and landscape that reflects the farming, ranching, and mining history of the Southwest. The summers are warm and dry, and the winters can be very cold. There are many recreational opportunities including hiking and biking trails, the Arkansas and Rio Grande Rivers for floating or tubing, and several awesome ski areas. Living in rural Colorado provides a slow-paced lifestyle that is difficult to find elsewhere. For more information, please see our document, *"Living and Serving in Southern Colorado"*.

If I decide to apply, what happens next?

Once we receive your application and resume, we will review them to determine if you're a strong candidate for an interview. If selected, we will reach out to schedule a phone interview.

After the interview, we will conduct reference checks. If we determine that you're a good fit, we will extend a formal offer—typically within two weeks of your interview. However, in some cases, this timeline may be extended if we experience delays in reaching your references.

What can I expect if I accept a position with AAI?

You can expect to make a positive impact on youth in Southern Colorado and gain experience as a professional in education and youth development. If you're open to it, your year of service will also provide you with many opportunities for personal growth, learning new hobbies, and connecting with people who have different worldviews and lived experiences.

If I'm offered a position as an AAI AmeriCorps Member, when would I need to arrive in Colorado?

We have two start dates: August and January.

- The January cohort begins orientation on January 12th, 2026 with the service term ending December 19th, 2026.
- The August cohort begins orientation on August 24th, 2026, with the service term ending July 10th, 2027.

Both cohorts have the option to renew for a second term.

To ensure a smooth transition, we recommend arriving at least a few days before orientation to move into housing and settle in. AAI housing will be available the Friday before orientation starts.

Does AAI provide housing?

Yes. Members are required to live in AAI housing and with other AAI AmeriCorps members. AAI contracts with landlords and subleases houses and apartments to members.

- Members sign a lease and pay a \$600 security deposit (payment plans available based on need).
- Rent is deducted from each member's living stipend every two weeks.
- All housing includes a bed and is either partially or fully furnished.
- AAI covers all utilities except Wi-Fi. Members are responsible for purchasing internet access.
- Free mail delivery is available at most locations, but not all; members may choose to rent a PO box.
- Pets, partners, family members, and friends are not permitted in AAI housing.

Rent for the 2026 January term is \$328 every two weeks (approximately \$656 per month). Rent has not yet been finalized for 2026 August starts.

Can I have a pet?

We love animals, but AAI housing does not allow pets.

Service animals and emotional support animals (ESA) are considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with AAI's Service Animals Policy. Members seeking accommodation for a service animal or ESA must complete a request form, provide necessary documentation, and comply with housing guidelines.

For more details, please review AAI's Service Animals Policy or contact program staff.

Can I bring my firearm?

No. The possession of any firearm, ammunition, or other weapon is strictly prohibited.

Is there relocation assistance?

Yes, travel assistance for incoming members may be available based on individual need. Each year, a small pool of funds becomes available, which AAI may use to help new members relocate to Colorado. Therefore, we ask that only those who truly require financial travel assistance request it. Applications for assistance will be shared after hiring.

Do I need to have my own vehicle?

While a personal vehicle is not required, it is a great benefit, given our location. There is essentially no public transportation in our rural communities, and the towns we serve are very small and some are spaced out across relatively great distances. Bringing a bicycle may be an option in some towns, although winter temperatures can be as low as - 20°F, and even colder temperatures are not uncommon in some locations. AAI provides limited community vehicle access for qualifying AmeriCorps members. These vehicles are for transportation to and from AAI-sanctioned trainings and events only, not for commuting to service sites. Daily commuting options may include carpooling with fellow members or site staff, as well as school buses for those serving in schools.

What sort of orientation is there?

Each year, our largest orientation occurs in late August, with a smaller, shorter orientation for members who start in January. Orientation includes an intensive initial four or five days with overnight stays in cabins at a camp.

During this time, members will learn about the region and communities they will serve, AAI's mission, values, and expectations, and what to expect as they get started at their site. Orientation also includes training on working with youth and finalizing onboarding paperwork.

This immersive experience is designed to help members build connections, develop confidence, and feel prepared for their service year.

How is my placement at a host site determined?

After your background check is complete, you will also receive a portfolio of site descriptions to help you gain a deeper understanding of the different service opportunities. You will then rank your preferences for where you would like to serve and live.

Placements are made based on the needs of our host sites, while also considering your preferences and strengths. We do our best to ensure an excellent match that supports both your growth and the success of the site.

What kind of support will I receive during my service year?

AAI provides layered support through your Program Manager, Site Supervisor, and the broader AAI staff team. You'll also have access to peer networks, professional development workshops, and individual check-ins throughout the year to ensure you feel prepared and connected.

Are all member positions the same?

No. Responsibilities vary depending on the host site. Duties may include full-time extracurricular programming, full-time academic interventions, or a combination of both.

What is YMHC?

The Youth Mental Health Corps (YMHC) is a national AmeriCorps initiative designed to increase youth access to mental health support. All AAI AmeriCorps Members are automatically enrolled unless they choose to opt out. YMHC members complete the Behavioral Health Plus Certification through Front Range Community College, (approximately 10 weeks, 1.5 hours per week) while serving in their AAI placement.

Through this training, members learn how to recognize signs of distress, practice active listening, and connect youth with appropriate resources. YMHC members help their schools and communities build capacity to support youth mental wellness.

Tuition for the certification is fully covered by AAI, and successful completion provides an industry-recognized credential in behavioral health. Members who opt out of YMHC will still complete the standard AmeriCorps service term but will not participate in the coursework, and will receive a reduced living allowance.

How is the living stipend distributed?

Every two weeks, a living stipend is deposited directly into your bank account. The 2026 January start stipend amount is \$979 gross per pay period. The actual amount deposited into your account will depend on taxes and rent deductions. The amount for the 2026 August start has not yet been set but will be a minimum of \$979.

Is there a dress code?

Yes. When actively serving, AmeriCorps Members are expected to wear one of their “AmeriCorps Greens.” These include t-shirts, hoodies, and polos with the AmeriCorps logo that are supplied by AAI with no charge. In addition, members are expected to dress in a professional manner that is acceptable at their specific site. Each site has a stated dress code, which is normally dress-casual.

How much do I get for the Education Award?

After successfully completing your term, you will be eligible for a Segal Education Award. The award amount is based on your term length and is adjusted annually based on the Pell Grant.

For the 2025 Fiscal year (which includes the January 2026 term), the award is \$7,395 pre-tax for 1700 hour members. The exact amount for the August 2026 term will be determined closer to the start of the service year.

How is my Education Award received?

Your education award is received after completion of your full term of service through the Corporation for National and Community Service. Navigating this process will be covered in your training.

What can my Education Award be used for?

You can use your education award to pay for educational expenses such as tuition, student fees, books, or other course-related supplies, or to repay qualified student loans. Qualified courses include most post-secondary colleges, universities, and technical schools. Qualified student loans include loans backed by the federal government under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (except PLUS Loans to parents of students), loans under Titles VII or VIII of the Public Service Health Act, and loans made by a state agency.

Are there other perks?

Yes! You will receive professional development training in areas such as academic interventions, youth development, restorative practices, trauma-informed care, mental health first aid, mandatory reporting, and creating spaces for all youth. Some host sites also sponsor additional certifications, including First Aid/CPR and Wilderness First Aid.

You'll be part of an amazing community, both within AAI and in the town where you serve. You'll also have the opportunity to participate in free outdoor recreation excursions, including hiking, camping, backpacking, and snowshoeing, with access to our gear library through the Backyard to Backcountry Program.

YMHC members receive access to exclusive wellness and professional growth resources, including a personal mental health toolkit, resilience and self-care training, optional counseling support, and the opportunity to participate in reflective practice groups. Members also have access to career development coaching and post-service transition resources through the national YMHC network.

Additional benefits include health insurance, eligibility for SNAP (food assistance), interest deferment, and loan forbearance for qualified student loans.

What do members typically do after their service term?

Many alumni go on to careers in education, counseling, youth development, or nonprofit leadership. Others pursue undergraduate or graduate programs using their Segal Education Award, or continue into second AmeriCorps terms with increased leadership responsibility. AAI's focus on professional skills, mentoring, and career exploration helps members clarify their goals and build strong resumes for future opportunities.