In Service of Stronger Communities

Revitalizing Community Through the Flint National Service Accelerator: A Toolkit

For more information, see the full collection of reports in this series:

- Closing the Gaps: Service Members in Flint Community Schools
- Community Wellness: Service Members in a Healthy Flint
- Profiles in Community Building: Service Members of Greater Flint
- Raising Community Resilience: Service Members and Flint’s Water Crisis
- Safe and Thriving: Service Members in the Neighborhoods of Flint
- The Service Imperative: Revitalizing Community Through the Flint National Service Accelerator

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About This Guide

In September 2016, the United Way of Genesee County hired Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct a process and outcomes evaluation of the National Service Accelerator (“the Accelerator”) initiative in Flint, Michigan, a relatively new kind of community initiative intended to help strengthen and expand national service and deploy it effectively to achieve community-wide goals.

The Accelerator is a place-based initiative that seeks to leverage national service programs, such as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, to expand the services available to the greater Flint community, to build the capacity of community organizations to provide those services, and to establish a community-wide culture of service and volunteerism, especially among youth.

Through a series of interviews, focus groups, site visits, and surveys, SPR’s evaluation focused on understanding the outcomes and added value of service and participation in the Accelerator for national service members, organizations and service programs, and Flint community residents. The evaluation spanned one year, from September 2016 to September 2017, and all Accelerator data presented in this guide pertain to that time frame.

The Accelerator is unique but can offer city leaders, community change-makers, and other innovators seeking to launch or improve similar initiatives some ideas, models, and lessons to inform their own efforts. This guide outlines the key elements of the National Service Accelerator and provides service champions in other communities with questions to guide project planning, examples of each of the key Accelerator elements, and supplemental resources for further review. It also includes brief descriptions of efforts to promote place-based service strategies in Tucson (AZ), New York City (NY), and North Carolina based on SPR’s calls with strategy leaders in those areas (Appendix B).

We hope that local leaders interested in enhancing or expanding national service to meet their community’s needs will find value in the resources provided—and can reinvent fewer wheels.
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The purpose of Flint’s National Service Accelerator is to grow the number and effectiveness of national service members in the greater Flint community. It is a place-based initiative that seeks to leverage the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps national service programs for impact at three levels: member and alumni, organization and program, and broader community. To achieve this, the Accelerator offers technical assistance to host sites, coordination among organizations and programs, training and professional development for members, and other supports to make service efforts successful and to create a culture of service that can move the needle on community-identified priorities (see Exhibit 1, next page).

Since its launch in 2011, Flint’s National Service Accelerator has exceeded expectations. Between September 2016 and September 2017, 444 national service members—many of them long-time residents of Flint—served in the greater Flint community’s organizations, neighborhoods, and schools. The Accelerator has helped advance major community objectives, such as reducing blight and crime, improving education, and creating economic opportunity. In 2016, it also played a critical role in responding to Flint’s water crisis.

The Accelerator is both unique to greater Flint and, at the same time, emblematic of the creative and place-based strategies civic leaders are using to strengthen their communities through national service. Broadly speaking, a service accelerator can be understood as a place-based effort to grow service, coordinate service streams, and promote service and volunteerism, offering communities the opportunity to better leverage national service members as powerful agents of change.

Like Flint, several other communities across the country have established or are launching place-based strategies to address unique local issues. For example, in Tucson, Arizona, a place-based intervention was created to address low high school completion and college attendance rates associated with poverty. In New York City, stewarding a culture of service is part of the city’s efforts to ensure that the needs of its five boroughs and over eight million residents are met. And in North Carolina, several communities statewide are launching service acceleration initiatives to address a variety of place-based issues. This guide highlights approaches and lessons learned from the Flint model and the experiences of these other communities to inform leaders interested in designing, implementing, or improving their own place-based service strategies.

1 About the National Service Accelerator: http://www.unitedwaygenesee.org/flint-national-service-accelerator
The background and history of the creation of Flint's National Service Accelerator are summarized in *The Service Imperative: Revitalizing Community Through the Flint National Service Accelerator*.
Five Key Elements

There are five key elements that have played important roles in the success of the National Service Accelerator in Flint. They are:

1. Leadership and Organizational Infrastructure
2. Vision and Community Relevance
3. Value-Added Services
4. Funding
5. Demonstrating Impact

As illustrated in Exhibit 2, the five elements work together to provide an environment in which service can be employed strategically to respond to long-term and short-term community needs. Like a car, with its individual and interdependent pieces, the key structures work together to accelerate service.
Key Element 1: Leadership and Organizational Infrastructure

In Flint, three specific aspects of leadership helped the Accelerator gain traction early on as well as steadily increase its impact over time:

- Engagement with a backbone institution;
- Engagement of anchor institutions; and
- Operational know-how.

Backbone Institution

The idea for the Accelerator originated at the Mott Foundation—one of the most trusted organizations in the region—where a program officer first wondered what could be done to scale national service as a strategy for Flint’s community revitalization efforts.

Staff at the Mott Foundation collaborated with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Flint to further the idea. This organization had hosted AmeriCorps service members in the past and had a strong sense of the needs of children and families in the area. A consultant was hired and housed at the Boys & Girls Clubs, which became the original host for the Accelerator to get the initiative off the ground.

At the same time, the Mott Foundation partnered with the Community Foundation of Greater Flint to launch the National Service Fund in 2011 (see Key Element 4). In 2012, Flint was awarded a Cities of Service Impact Volunteering Fund and, as a result, the consultant put on an additional hat as Chief Service Officer with the City of Flint and sought to align community volunteer initiatives with growth in national service.

In 2015, the United Way of Genesee County, already a trusted partner and funder of dozens of area nonprofit organizations, became the Accelerator’s new home and backbone institution. The United Way was an obvious choice to host the Accelerator: the organization had leadership familiar with national service (the CEO of the United Way was an AmeriCorps alum), extensive and trusted relationships in the community, and a mandate to operate on a countywide scale to impact a variety of community needs. By seeking alignment between the United Way’s focal areas and the priorities of national service, the Accelerator was able to increase the United Way’s community footprint and add value to the organization. In turn, the United Way increased the Accelerator’s network and connections while lending leadership and trustworthiness to the initiative.

At this time, the contract consultant position developed into a full-time staff member dedicated to overseeing the Accelerator initiative (the Accelerator Manager), who could operate from the same countywide collaborative approach that the United Way espoused, and could provide technical assistance and support to all national service programs and streams across the service spectrum.

While having a backbone institution may not be a requirement in all communities to advance a place-based service strategy, programs like those in Flint, New York City, and North Carolina have benefited from having a single organization take primary ownership of their initiatives while collaborating heavily with anchor institutions and community partners.
Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions play important roles in community development because they have significant assets to bring to community initiatives. Schools, for example, can offer infrastructure, service contracts, and ready access to young people; state agencies and foundations can offer resources, convening power, and public service missions; and community-based organizations can maintain employer relationships, nonprofit partners in the service business, and extensive community networks.

A few of the anchor institutions for Flint’s National Service Accelerator are: The Mott Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Flint, the Red Cross East Central Bay, the Crim Fitness Foundation, the City of Flint, the University of Michigan–Flint, Valley Area Agency on Aging, and Habitat for Humanity. Many of these organizations are represented in the Service Champions Workgroup (see Key Element 2).

These types of organizations play multiple and overlapping roles: they help recruit residents for service programs; act as host organizations for service members; provide meeting venues, professional development opportunities, and resources; champion the idea of service; and much more. The support and connectivity of multiple anchor institutions make them more than the sum of their parts, creating just the kind of ecosystem needed to grow and scale Flint’s service programs. Some communities are also finding it useful to have partnership agreements in place between programs, anchor institutions, and other stakeholders to encourage alignment and continued collaboration.

Two other types of anchor institutions must be noted here: the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC). At the federal level, CNCS oversees all national service programs, with a Michigan field office directly administering VISTA and Senior Corps in the state. MCSC is responsible for administering all of the AmeriCorps State programs that operate in Michigan. These agencies are vital to Flint’s ability to secure and support national service resources; champion the idea of service; and manage national service programs that utilize these federal and state resources to meet local needs. Service members commit to full- or part-time terms with nonprofit organizations or public agencies and receive stipends and/or educational awards in return for their service. Service programs have helped boost the reach and capacity of public agencies, schools, and nonprofit organizations to deliver services, respond to crises, and support innovation and community engagement.

Dedicated Staff and Operational Know-How

The United Way employs a full-time staff person, the Accelerator Manager, to oversee the Accelerator effort. The complex nature of this type of initiative benefits from a dedicated staff person who excels at managing administrative functions, such as reporting or funding streams, and managing processes that directly impact people, such as listening to needs and coordinating support for service members. The individual needs to be neutral, in that s/he is committed to the success of every service program and member, and not be tied—by grant dollars or other factors—primarily to one program or another.

Practical skills—such as community organizing, planning and organizational skills, and communication and stakeholder management skills—are also essential in the day-to-day work of building the capacity of Flint’s civic and nonprofit communities to vastly increase the number of successful service members they can host, and to engage them in strategic ways that make a difference in schools, neighborhoods, and the city and county.

The Accelerator Manager is the go-to person for national service in Flint. This includes acting as a clearinghouse and starting point of contact for stakeholders inside and outside of the community—someone to turn to regarding service and streamlining a complex web of programs and initiatives.

Having a dedicated staff person may not be an option for all communities just starting out with service acceleration, but...
several communities have realized the value of having a neutral person to oversee the place-based service work. (See the Supplemental Materials for a position description for the Accelerator Manager in Flint).

### Key Questions for Organizers

- Do you have partners who are deeply knowledgeable about your community and the problems your initiative seeks to address? Which partners are most trusted by community members? Do the partners in your project play roles that make the best use of their strengths? Can you identify an ideal backbone institution?
- Do you have the support of anchor institutions? What assets are they contributing to the effort? What assets could they contribute (e.g., social networks, talent, tech support, physical capital, public relations, funding)? Are they connected to each other through planning committees or governance arrangements that encourage them to work together?
- How do/will you staff your effort? What are the skills, competencies, professional networks, and other attributes your staff needs in the short term and over time? What kinds of administrative and organizational supports are available to staff?

### Further Resources

- Description of “Flint Fueled by Service” initiative: Appendix H
- United Way of Genesee County 2016 Annual Report: Appendix I

### Key Element 2: Vision and Community Relevance

Stakeholders identified a clear opportunity for the Accelerator initiative: service programs could help extend the reach and impact of Flint’s nonprofit organizations to address urgent community-identified needs, but these organizations lacked the capacity and funding to take full advantage. In order to maximize this opportunity for the community, leaders realized that the approach needed to be strategic, coordinated, and aligned with community-identified priorities to ensure greatest buy-in.

### Aligning with Community-Identified Priorities

In 2013, over 5,000 residents and stakeholders came together to craft and adopt a 20-year Master Plan for the community—its first in more than 50 years. A short time later, the Accelerator produced a 5-year plan, *Mobilizing the Power of People: City of Flint Framework for National Service and Volunteerism Expansion,* which explained how national service and volunteerism could operate alongside other strategies to meet the goals articulated in the Master Plan. The 5-year plan outlined a vision to grow from 25 service members in 2014, to 250 by 2020.

### Tip:

**Incorporate service into your city’s planning and revitalization efforts.**

The City of Flint gave the Accelerator initiative a boost by identifying service as a specific strategy for supporting community revitalization in its Master Plan and putting the city’s weight behind it, vastly increasing the Accelerator’s prospects for sustainability. This also provided a public platform for convening partners and community members to explain how service would advance the city’s strategy and to engage them in the effort.

Since its adoption, the Master Plan has been the driving force behind development and new initiatives in Flint. This is because it speaks collectively for the people and has buy-in from major government agencies, nonprofits, funders, educational institutions, and neighborhood groups. Aligning the service expansion strategy with the Master Plan provided both legitimacy and consistency to the Accelerator initiative, making it easier for new partners to buy in and giving coherence to the Accelerator’s collective efforts as they grew in scope and scale. This guiding framework has been instrumental in creating a shared vision throughout the greater Flint community.

### Creating a Shared Vision

A shared vision describes impact, not just outcomes—in other words, not just the number of people who participate in an activity or what they do, but also how lives, institutions, or communities are changed as a result. A shared vision can have broad appeal as a variety of stakeholders understand how they fit into it and would benefit from its realization. Accelerator champions in Flint created a shared vision of increasing national service ten-fold, to result in:

- Creating a culture of service;
- Cultivating the next generation of civic leaders; and
- Transforming public and community services.

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This vision is articulated in the 5-year Service Expansion Plan. To help guide the implementation and propel the shared vision, the Service Champions Workgroup was created. This advisory body, made up of key community individuals, helps guide the Accelerator, advises on opportunities, challenges, and emerging trends, and helps tell the story of service to its networks and constituents. While the backbone institution is important, it cannot be a lone voice, and the Service Champions Workgroup, with representatives from several anchor institutions, adds legitimacy to the shared vision and amplifies the message. All of the organizations represented in the Workgroup understand how growth in the number and effectiveness of national service members can benefit individual organizations as well as the greater Flint community.

Other organizations and individuals can also become part of the movement by understanding and buying into the shared vision. Growing the number of national service positions to address community needs and create a next generation of service leaders is an accessible objective for city and county government agencies, educational institutions, and organizations that work in youth development, environmental sustainability, elder care, economic development, health, and other areas. Thus, the service strategy benefits from community relevance. Other communities have also found that a plan to guide the place-based service initiative helps to create a shared vision and to position the service strategy as a relevant community endeavor capable of garnering widespread support.

Guided by the Service Expansion Plan, the community needs of the Master Plan, and the Service Champions Workgroup, the Accelerator has been able to grow the number of service members in the community in alignment with local priorities. New programs like the Flint Community School Corps, Flint Urban Safety Corps, and Flint Recovery Corps were created directly from community-identified priorities. Days of Service completed by service members often address urgent community needs—for example, installing smoke detectors to prevent fires, cleaning neighborhoods and boarding houses, and completing school improvement projects (for more on Days of Service, see Key Element 3). Finally, Flint is a community of high unemployment and underemployment. By focusing on local recruitment, the Accelerator is able to ensure that service is a vehicle for local residents to gain experience and be launched towards their next opportunities.
Key Questions for Organizers

- Is there a leadership or governing model guiding how the work of partners fits together? Do partners and institutions have a clear understanding of their roles? How much autonomy do leaders and partners have?

- Does your project have a logic model or theory of change? An explicit strategy? Other founding documents? Were they collaboratively developed or are they open to change? Do you share them? How do you use them? Are there other municipal, county, regional, or issue-based strategies of which your project is or could be a part?

Further Resources

Key Element 3: Value-Added Services

Flint’s model and shared vision are appealing to many nonprofit and government organizations. However, there are practical challenges that accompany such an effort, especially at the scale that Flint aspired to reach. To address these challenges, the Accelerator makes assisting current and potential host organizations a top priority.

Services for Host Organizations and Service Programs

The Accelerator provides an array of services and technical assistance to host organizations and service programs, from hands-on help completing paperwork, to organizational-level consulting, to working with hosts to maximize the benefits of participation in service programs. The Accelerator does not duplicate or compete with existing services provided by the host organizations, nor does it seek to replicate the support and technical assistance provided by the state commission or CNCS field office. Rather, the Accelerator provides supports to fill gaps, leverages resources across organizations, and helps all organizations benefit from learnings.

As an example, the Accelerator helps host organizations recruit service members. The traditional model for member recruitment is that each host site or program is responsible for its own recruitment, and competition over high-quality candidates can be fierce. However, the Accelerator seeks to remove that competition by recruiting for national service collectively—see the Flint page on the Service Year Exchange, or the collaborative recruitment page on the United Way of Genesee County’s website—helping candidates find the program that is the best fit, then connecting them to host sites or program managers who can best place them in positions where they will be successful for the term of service.

Practically, providing Accelerator support to organizations requires staff to invest considerable time in giving presentations, convening meetings, hosting events, connecting host organizations to one another and to other resources, providing technical assistance directly (on the phone and in-person), and reminding stakeholders of the importance of their shared vision and endeavor. The place-based service initiatives in New York City (through the NYC Service Year Support Center) and North Carolina have staff who fulfill similar functions, helping local organizations build capacity for national service.

National Service Accelerator Services for Organizations and Service Programs

Although the mix of services and technical assistance provided to organizations varies based on the needs of specific host sites, the Accelerator has provided the following ongoing services:

- **Recruitment of new host organizations** through frequent presentations to community organizations, schools, agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations about how national service can benefit them.

- **Help for host organizations applying for participation** in service programs, including provision of information on the full range of service programs, an assessment of which would best suit the organization’s needs, and completion of federal and state grant applications and budgeting.

- **Assistance recruiting and placing service members and volunteers**, through newsletters, postings on local job boards, an online platform with all local service opportunities, and job fairs, as well as first-round screenings to connect candidates with best-fit programs.

- **Help designing high quality and meaningful service experiences** for service members that help the host organization accomplish its goals.

- **Funding through the National Service Fund** to help thinly resourced organizations with the match required to support service members (see Key Element 4).

- **Help solving practical problems** that host organizations confront, such as housing for service members and transportation to host sites.

- **Consulting on how to manage and support service** during the service term, from basic human resources issues like onboarding new members to administrative responsibilities such as program reporting.

- **Communication and networking of host organizations** to one another to encourage collaboration on shared interests or areas of expertise and create a sense of community.

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4 Profile of Flint National Service Accelerator through Service Year Alliance: https://serviceyear.org/flintnationalservice/

5 Service Accelerator recruitment portal: http://www.unitedwaygenesee.org/serve-now
Services for Service Members

The Accelerator also provides value-added services directly to national service members in greater Flint. By enhancing the support offered to members through their host sites and programs, the Accelerator is able to expand and improve the types of resources available to members, improving the overall service experience.

The Accelerator provides networking support to service members in order to encourage relationship-building with peers, civic leaders, and subject matter experts relevant to members’ current or future positions. The Accelerator also helps members with problem solving. The Accelerator manager serves as a point of contact outside the host organization who can help address challenges and facilitate service members’ integration into their programs, into their organizations and roles, and into the Flint community.

Other key member supports to be discussed further in this section, include:

- Skill-building and professional development;
- Service and celebration days; and
- Resources, mentoring and scholarships.

Skill Building and Professional Development

Skill building is a nearly universal goal among service programs across the country. No single host organization could offer opportunities at the same scale, quality, and frequency as the Accelerator. Skill building opportunities in common areas of need, like grant writing, communication skills, and problem solving, are particularly valued by both service members and by their host organizations.

Between September 2017 and June 2017, the National Service Accelerator offered training in the following areas to service members:

- Flint, Michigan 101 (Getting to Know the Community)
- Professionalism
- Living on a Budget
- Cultural Competency
- Life After AmeriCorps Day
- Avoiding Burnout
- Sustainability
- Grant Writing

In addition to the topics highlighted above, mock interviews and resume reviews are offered once a year. The Accelerator brings together professionals from the community to provide feedback to service members on their resumes and to conduct mock interviews to help members meet their post-AmeriCorps goals.

Many service members pointed to the Accelerator’s Life After AmeriCorps Day program as a particularly important Accelerator activity. The day-long program is held annually and serves as a combination career fair and personal/professional boot camp. It combines self-reflection and assessment, networking, and alumni career presentations with sessions and workshops on job hunting; graduate school; service careers; transition support; and leadership.

Service and Celebration Days

The Accelerator works closely with Genesee Serves, the community volunteer center (also housed at the United Way), as well as with host organizations and service members to engage members and citizen volunteers in large-scale service projects. These have included 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance (on September 11), Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service (in January), Global Youth Service Day (in April), and Russ Mawby Service Project (in May). The Accelerator also organizes events for AmeriCorps Week and National Service Recognition Day, removing the cost and organizational burden from individual programs. All of these events provide service members with structured opportunities to gain new experiences and to work with each other and with community members to advance and create large-scale community impact.

Tip:
Use a newsletter to communicate with current service members and alumni.

On a regular basis, the Accelerator sends out an email newsletter, Ameri-News, to all national service members, supervisors, and program managers in the greater Flint area. It provides information about upcoming Accelerator meetings and/or Days of Service, opportunities to get additional service hours or volunteer in the community, resources to support members, job opportunities for members finishing their service, and other relevant information. Often, Ameri-News will feature member highlights and/or a member spotlight. Through this simple process, members feel connected to the Accelerator and to each other, they have the opportunity to be more successful in their service term, and the culture of service is advanced.

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6 Dr. Russell G. Mawby served as chief executive officer and chair of the board of trustees of W.K. Kellogg Foundation from 1970 to 1995, and was a dedicated supporter of volunteerism and philanthropy for much of his life. Regional service projects sponsored by the MCSC occur annually in his honor.
Resources, Mentoring, and Scholarships

Other supports for service members include:

- **Flint Connects Guide** is modeled after the New York City Connect Guide. It offers service members tips and resources for navigating Flint as a service member.

- **Ameri-Mentoring** connects members who are in their second or third term of service with an alum or other professional in the community who can be a mentor and source of support in navigating next steps or other professional growth issues.

- **Alumni connections** are established through convenings that take place on at least an annual basis. This helps them stay connected to the service community and also leverages their skills in supporting currently serving members.

- **Training scholarships** are, at times, available. The Accelerator has been able to leverage scholarships or discounts to members for trainings that are being offered by others in the community, like the local Chamber of Commerce.

**Tip:** Engage a membership council to make decisions about needed services and supports.

To ensure that the Accelerator offerings to members are relevant, timely, and helpful, the Flint Member Leadership Council was established. Each program operating locally can nominate one or two members to sit on the Council to advise the Accelerator Manager, create connections across programs, capitalize on the strengths and talents of members, and bring member voice to the table.

Building a Network Among National Service-Utilizing Organizations

By helping service members and supervisors from different host organizations collaborate, the Accelerator is creating a network of organizations that are developing stronger partnerships. For example, in the Flint Community Schools, 83 service members span five service programs and serve alongside public school educators to support students and families. These members and program staff need to understand each other’s roles to avoid duplication of services and maximize the benefit that national service brings to the school district. In another example, the Accelerator helped organize a cadre of 58 service members from four programs who served in five host organizations. Their work focused on reducing crime, mitigating blight, and promoting public safety.

At the onset of the water crisis, the Accelerator’s network allowed it to quickly mobilize to secure AmeriCorps NCCC teams to deliver water to residents and aid in the emergency response. The Accelerator also worked with service members already in the Flint area and their host organizations to support the water distribution effort and provide information about water safety to residents.

Through these efforts, new partnerships were created among the organizations that extend beyond the service members and that help organizations better accomplish their missions. The Accelerator is thus helping to remove competition and leverage resources among programs and organizations in order to maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

Creating a Talent Pipeline and a Next Generation of Civic Leaders

The majority of Flint’s national service members are from the local area, rather than elsewhere in the country. (During the evaluation period, almost half of AmeriCorps members recruited were from Flint or Genesee County, and nearly all Senior Corps members were local.) Local residents who engage in service receive the training and professional development that comes with being service members in the Accelerator model. As empowered agents of change, this helps to launch them to their next endeavors.

Upon completing their service terms, Flint AmeriCorps members are now, in many cases, getting jobs in the community. To improve job prospects for these members, the Accelerator...
is working to sign on local businesses and organizations as **Employers of National Service**. Other service alumni have been accepted into one of Flint’s higher education institutions to use the national service education award (see below for more information). All of these efforts are creating a local talent pipeline of service alumni who will stay in the greater Flint area and continue to give their time and talent to help the community.

Creating Economic Opportunity and Promoting Education Attainment

While the living allowance that comes with an AmeriCorps service term is modest ($12,000–$17,000 for a full term), it is nevertheless significant in allowing people from low-income communities to serve and give back to their community. The **living allowance** permits people from all walks of life to participate in service: individuals who have been out of the workforce, recent graduates, professionals looking to change careers, seniors who are retired but are still looking to be engaged in the community, or young people trying to find their next step. Full-time, half-time, quarter-time, and summer service terms are available to provide an opportunity for as many people as possible to find a path to service. A national service term, though temporary, provides a steady income for 10–12 months, health coverage in most cases, and the aforementioned training, professional development, and networking that make the experience invaluable.

At the completion of their service term, members are eligible to receive an **education award** of nearly $6,000, which they can use to pay off student loans or attain further education, preferably at one of the four higher education institutions in Flint. Members age 55+ can donate the education award to a child or grandchild. While some Senior Corps programs offer a small stipend, the primary benefit of Senior Corps is that it allows seniors to give back to their community while remaining independent and self-sufficient. Through these resources, national service is providing economic opportunity, self-sufficiency, and educational attainment for the members and alumni. In a city like Flint, which has high unemployment and high poverty, this value should not be underestimated.

Changing the Narrative About Flint

With all of the negative national exposure that Flint has experienced in recent decades, first with crime and blight, and more recently with the water crisis, the narrative told about the city tends to be highly negative. **Telling a story of national service** and people-powered solutions helps turn that story around and highlights the positive aspects of the community, inspiring hope and motivating change. The Accelerator has partnered with national organizations like Service Year Alliance as well as local organizations like the Mott Foundation and the United Way to create mini-documentaries, videos, social media pieces, blog posts, and other tools that share with the nation a different side of Flint. In the long run, image is important for talent and business recruitment and retention, with many other ripple effects. For two examples, see a Service Year Alliance/NationSwell video and a blog post on Huffington Post.

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**Tip:**
**Advance a culture of service through community events and reports that celebrate service.**

Events that celebrate service and make its impact evident are important in promoting engagement and service. For example, in June 2017, the Accelerator presented “Stories of Running Toward Service,” an event featuring 10 service members sharing insights and experiences through TED-like talks. Similarly, it is important to share and celebrate outcomes and milestones with service members, not just funders, to increase their pride in service and connectivity to the cause. The Accelerator produced a one-page 9/11 Day of Service Impact Report, complete with photos and quotes. This simple document contains an impressive array of outcomes, from assembly of 100 Halloween safety kits to improvements to the integrity of two levees to prevent flooding.
Key Questions for Organizers

- What value-added services does your community provide for service members? For host organizations? For the community? Are these services aligned with the goals you seek to achieve? The goals of host agencies? The goals of service members? How will you know if needs change?

- How and with what frequency are these services provided? By whom? With what tools? How are they supported?

- What are the broader community implications of the services that can be offered to members, organizations, or the community at large?

Further Resources


Key Element 4: Funding

While national service is a cost-effective resource for organizations, it is not free; sometimes even a small host site fee is prohibitive for thinly-resourced organizations that can most benefit from service. In Flint, the money from the National Service Fund makes it possible for first-time host organizations to participate and for others to increase the number of service members they take on. The Fund is one of the most unique services offered by the Accelerator. Many organizations would simply not be able to participate in national service at the level that they do, were it not for the funding provided to them through the National Service Fund.

The Fund provides the matching support required by programs for organizations to host members, ranging from a few thousand dollars to $170,000 per organization, depending on the number of service members. It can also provide funding to host sites to help cover the costs of member training, travel, and a portion of housing. Between 2016 and 2017, nine local organizations were awarded over $500,000 to cover the local match required to host AmeriCorps members. As a result, these organizations were collectively able to host 92 members that year.

Because each allocation from the Fund requires a written report to share out about member outputs, outcomes, and impacts, the Fund provides an opportunity for data sharing and to collect information on the impact that national service is making in the community. With the funding also comes the expectation that host sites, programs, members, and supervisors will be a part of the culture of service being created and will participate in Accelerator gatherings. New York City has launched a similar fund to help organizations offset the cost of hosting members, and other communities are exploring the possibility of service funds.

The National Service Fund

- The grant program is funded by the Mott Foundation and administered by the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.
- Host organizations secure approval to host a service member or program from CNCS, the commission, or an intermediary.
- The Flint organization applies for support through the Fund (with technical assistance available from the Accelerator) to help with the local match requirement, training, and member support costs.
- At the completion of the grant period, the organization reports to the Accelerator on what members accomplished.

Key Questions for Organizers

- Is cost a barrier to local organizations taking increased advantage of national service resources in your community? What are the true costs to organizations to host members?
- Are there local or regional entities (e.g., foundations, businesses, local charities) that would be interested in supporting a service strategy?
- Are there other opportunities for funding that can be explored?
- Do your local education institutions play a role (e.g., providing instruction, awarding certification or credit)?

Further Resources

Key Element 5: Demonstrating Impact

The Accelerator seeks to achieve outcomes for three different constituencies: service members and alumni, service host sites and programs, and the Flint community.

• **Service member and alumni outcomes** include skills acquisition, mentoring and support, perceptions of positive service experience, and membership in a community of professionals.

• **Host site outcomes** include increased capacity to host members, stronger ability to accomplish mission-driven objectives, and stronger connectivity between organizations serving the community.

• **Community outcomes** include the retention of skilled young people in the Flint workforce and moving the needle on community issues.

In order to demonstrate that this impact is being made, the Accelerator needs a variety of data and buy-in from programs and host sites to share data for collective good.

Aggregating Data Across Programs

Each national service program has its own performance metrics and system of collecting data, because each is individually responsible for reporting outputs and outcomes to its state and federal funders. The Accelerator is able to use networks and its shared vision to collect reports and aggregate data into meaningful numbers and stories.

Some basic tools that have been important for tracking Accelerator outcomes include the following:

• **A baseline survey** that doubles as an intake form for new service members to track information such as demographic characteristics (e.g., birthdate, gender, race, education), national service program and service site, and expectations about the service experience.

• **A post-service survey** to track changes in individual service member outcomes, including further education and job attainment.

• **A host site survey** to understand the influence of service members on the capacity of host organizations and to obtain feedback on Accelerator services.

• **Event logs and sign-in sheets** to track participation in regular trainings, community meetings, and events.

• **Program and host site reports** from organizations hosting members.

Tip:

Survey members to gather feedback on program quality and capture outcomes.

Pre- and post-experience polls or surveys can help identify the services, events, and activities service members value most, and reveal their impact. Sample questions from Flint’s survey include:

• Do you plan to stay in Flint/Genesee County after your service ends?

• Would you recommend national service to others?

• If you plan to use the education award, do you plan to use it at an institution in Genesee County?

• What do you think is the biggest impact your service has had on the Flint/Genesee County community so far?

• See the Supplemental Materials for the pre- and post-experience survey developed for the National Service.
Collective Outcomes

In order to assess impact beyond a collection of service members, Accelerator staff consider several data points:

• Growth in the number of service members hosted in the Flint area over time;
• Increase in the number of nonprofit organizations/city agencies/community organizations that host service members each year;
• Increase in participation in Days of Service throughout the year;
• Increase in media or other stories about service/service members;
• Increase in recognition of service members/service programs by community leaders;
• Overall citizen awareness of service programs; and
• Increase in the percentage of Flint-area high school and college students who apply to service programs.

By aggregating data across programs, the Accelerator can paint a broader picture of what service is accomplishing in the community.

Tip:

Develop data sharing agreements to ensure that member and program impacts can be captured.

In Austin, TX, the Serve Austin collaborative, a collection of national service programs in Austin seeking to create a grassroots place-based approach to service, has in place data sharing agreements between all of its programs to ensure that data on member and program impacts can be aggregated and amplified.

Key Questions for Organizers

• Are your outcome measures meaningful, individually and as a portfolio? Can you act on them? Do you know which measures are most useful and for what purpose?
• Do you have measures for each of the stakeholder groups you seek to impact through your efforts? Are they aligned or mutually reinforcing where needed? Are they measures your stakeholders care about?
• What kinds of incentives do your measures—individually and taken as a whole—create for your organization? Your stakeholders?
• Who is responsible for data collection? What tools do they use? Have you developed regular, repeatable processes for data collection? How is data used once it is collected?

Further Resources

• Guide for measuring the outcomes of intermediary nonprofit organizations, using St. Louis as an example, from the Gateway Center for Giving: http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/Documents/Measuring%20the%20Work%20of%20Intermediaries%20Paper%20FINAL.pdf
Wrap-Up

Flint’s National Service Accelerator is an innovative model that has significantly influenced the broader ecosystem of community revitalization efforts. At the time of the evaluation, it was still relatively early in its development. As such, this guide captures the formative work of this initiative in context and offers a glimpse into the resources, key elements, and considerations that went into creating it. The tips and tools provided in this guide should be considered examples—models that are still early in their development—for how service can be an effective strategy for community transformation. Other communities have their own models or are in the process of developing them.