



Thomas Ehrlich and Ernestine Fu, Contributor
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AmeriCorps: 20 Years, 800K Volunteers, 1B Hours of Service

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This year marks the 20th anniversary of [AmeriCorps](#). AmeriCorps is a U.S. federal government program that encourages people of all ages, and especially young people, to engage in public service at local nonprofit organizations, schools, and other community groups. It is built with strong bipartisan support to promote an ethic of service to others. Considered the domestic counterpart of the [Peace Corps](#), AmeriCorps was created by the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#).^{*} Since the program began, it has included over 800,000 volunteers who have contributed more than one billion hours of service.

At the time of induction, each volunteer recites the AmeriCorps Pledge, including these words:



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Thomas Ehrlich and Ernestine Fu
Contributor



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Tomio Geron
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“ I will get things done for America— to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.

Two AmeriCorps alumni spoke recently about their experiences. We gained insight into what motivated them to engage in public service, starting with AmeriCorps, and where they are today. We applaud them and all other AmeriCorps volunteers past, present, and future across the nation for their dedication to public service.

Meet Abby Flottesmesch and Charles Barrett Adams.

Abby Flottesmesch

Abby Flottesmesch joined AmeriCorps because, “as a family, service was always more than what we do—it was about who we are.” Her sister Jen joined [AmeriCorps VISTA](#), which is a part of AmeriCorps, in Dallas when President Clinton signed the National Community Service Trust Act in 1993. Nine years later, Abby herself joined AmeriCorps VISTA in Puerto Rico. Her younger sister Angela then joined after Hurricane Katrina. Abby said that through AmeriCorps, she and each of her sisters “discovered more of who we are because we were given the opportunity to apply, explore, and develop our talents.”

After completing her year of service in AmeriCorps VISTA, Abby has continued on what she described as a lifelong public-service journey. She started working full-time as the Chief Development & Engagement Officer at an international nonprofit called [Atlas Corps](#). As Abby describes her work, “we engage international professionals in a year of service.” For example, “a doctor from Sudan dedicates a year of service at [Susan G. Komen for the Cure in Washington](#), D.C. He shares his medical expertise while also gaining knowledge and a global network that he can bring back to his home country.” Abby told us that this is just one example of how the organization enables individuals to apply their unique skills both to improve their communities and to advance their own abilities.

Charles Barrett Adams

Charles Barrett Adams said he “was not satisfied with [his] options.” “I was at a crossroads, the most significant one of my life... Full of opinions and untested theories, I did not fully understand how I could help improve and positively move the urban African-American community through education.” He decided to join AmeriCorps to help that community.

During his time with AmeriCorps, Charles worked with Public Allies at the New Community After-School and Advocacy Program in the Shaw neighborhood in D.C.

Charles deeply enjoyed his experience. “The best thing I did while serving was learn—from children, from everyone. My little friends tutored me in love, creativity, hard work and resilience... Not only was I able to help others, but my fifteen months also taught me that all young people, regardless of zip code, complexion, accent, or income, deserve the opportunity to learn and gain access to their God-given potential.”

After completing the AmeriCorps program, Charles continued his service work. He returned to his hometown in Brooklyn, New York and just a few train stops from his elementary school, he started teaching 7th graders social studies.

Today, Charles heads the [SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C.](#) The [SEED Foundation](#) focuses on public boarding schools centered on college-prep in urban areas. Charles is at the first SEED school, and the Foundation plans to replicate it in other cities across the nation.

“With such a solid, secure start provided by AmeriCorps,” Charles said, “I am now approaching my 20th year as an educator and have served children and families in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.”

^{*} Thomas Ehrlich was for many years a board member of the Corporation for National and Community Service and was a chairman of its predecessor organization, the Commission on National and Community Service.

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We are the co-authors of Civic Work, Civic Lessons: Two Generations Reflect on Public Service. Tom Ehrlich's public service has been primarily in the federal government, while Ernestine Fu's has been in non-profit organizations. Tom worked in the administrations of five presidents starting

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The author is a Forbes contributor. The opinions expressed are those of the writer.

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