



## **AmeriCorps Legal Advocates of Massachusetts 2017-2018 Host Site Partner Information**



### **What is ALA-Massachusetts?**

AmeriCorps Legal Advocates of Massachusetts (ALA-Massachusetts) places 32 college and law school graduates to serve in poverty law organizations around the Commonwealth. Our full-time advocates serve a total of 1,700 hours over 46 weeks. The next service year begins on September 11, 2017 and ends on July 27, 2018.

Each year, ALA-Massachusetts seeks site partners to host AmeriCorps members. Organizations interested in hosting an AmeriCorps member must be non-profit entities which provide civil legal services to low-income residents of Massachusetts. Each partner agrees to take on financial, programmatic, and reporting responsibilities of hosting an AmeriCorps member.

ALA-Massachusetts selects partners each year from a pool of applicants. Preference is given to returning partners in good standing and organizations in Massachusetts funded by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation or the Legal Services Corporation. Remaining slots are open to non-profit organizations which provide legal services to low-income clients and demonstrate the capacity to supervise AmeriCorps advocates.

Nationally, AmeriCorps engages more than 75,000 Americans in intensive service each year at nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups. Since 2005, South Coastal Counties Legal Services has operated an AmeriCorps program to benefit low-income clients in need of legal assistance throughout Massachusetts. The program is dependent on a yearly funding award in June from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

### **Why have an AmeriCorps serve with your organization?**

Our AmeriCorps members leverage the capacity of an existing organization to address the need for legal services in its community. AmeriCorps members can be placed in a range of practice areas, and responsibilities can include direct client advocacy, intake, pro-bono recruitment, and community outreach and education. Since our program began, more than 250 advocates have served over 35,000 clients.

ALA-Massachusetts recruits aggressively to bring qualified and enthusiastic applicants into the program. Last year we received almost 150 applications for 32 slots. Half of our current members have attended law school, and 43% are admitted to practice law in Massachusetts. More than 40% of our members speak a second language such as Spanish, Portuguese or French.

While an AmeriCorps member is a great asset to an organization, the AmeriCorps program is not a shortcut for a program to get a staff attorney on board. Service members are not employees, and under AmeriCorps rules they cannot engage in activities that displace permanent staff responsibilities. AmeriCorps members choose to serve for little compensation, and most members come to the program in search of

substantive training and guidance from legal professionals. The value to an organization and clients is great, but our partners must be willing to invest resources to make the placement successful.

In many instances, organizations have hired an AmeriCorps member at the conclusion of the service year. Almost 30 of our alumni currently work at one of our partner sites.

### **What are the financial responsibilities of a host site partner?**

The federally funded AmeriCorps grant covers about 40% of the operating budget; the remainder is covered by site partner contributions. For 2017-2018, our site partners must provide *a \$16,960 cash contribution and a \$5,000 non-cash, in-kind contribution per member* (typically in the form of supervisor time, member travel reimbursement, and some member training costs). In addition, we encourage our partners to consider cover daily transportation expenses, especially if the cost of accessing the site is burdensome (ie, no access to low-cost parking or public transportation).

ALA-Massachusetts engages in a small amount of direct fundraising, and has been successful in obtaining Mass Bar Foundation funding for several years. While there is no guarantee of continued funding, any MBF funding the program receives in the future is used to reduce each partner's cash contribution.

### **What are the programmatic responsibilities of a host site partner?**

Each ALA-Massachusetts site partner agrees to:

- Participate in the selection of their AmeriCorps members by reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and completing reference checks;
- Assign each member a legal professional to serve as the on-site supervisor;
- Ensure that the on-site supervisor cooperates with a required three-part background check prior to the start of the service year;
- Ensure that the supervisor will invest at least 2 hours/week in direct supervision;
- Ensure that each supervisor attends an orientation session in September;
- Comply with AmeriCorps regulations and program expectations;
- Display an AmeriCorps poster in a public location;
- Provide a suitable workspace and equipment for the member's use; and
- Not offer an AmeriCorps candidate or member currently serving a permanent position, if that position would conflict with the member finishing the year.

Reporting burdens on the site partner are minimal, and include:

- Submission of interview and reference check forms for applicants;
- Submission of a service plan early in the program year;
- Weekly approval of AmeriCorps timesheet and client data;

- A monthly financial report;
- Written evaluations of each member two times a year.

### **What are the responsibilities of the on-site supervisor?**

Supervision is the *primary reason* why applicants choose to participate in ALA-Massachusetts. The on-site supervisor must be willing to establish a positive connection, to engage the AmeriCorps member, to provide training in the relevant practice area, and to meet regularly with the member to provide feedback and ensure the quality of the work. Partners must also support members to reach AmeriCorps program goals (see below). Supervision hours will be higher in the first few months of the program year.

Initially, supervisors should expect to have members shadow them in client meetings, court appearances, mediation, hearings, and community meetings to “learn the ropes.” Throughout the program year, AmeriCorps members should be considered “subordinate” under the SJC Rules of Professional Conduct 5.1, and supervisors are ultimately responsible for the clients assigned to their direct subordinates.

### **What are the responsibilities of the AmeriCorps member?**

Members agree to serve a total of 1,700 hours during the program year. Most of these hours are served in support of tasks and clients in accordance with the partner site’s priorities. Members must also dedicate a portion of their service hours to meet program expectations established by our AmeriCorps funding. These include activities in the areas of intakes/screenings, brief services, full representation, housing advocacy, volunteer engagement, member training and supervision, many of which overlap with partner priorities. Members and supervisors together make an effort to contribute to these goals. Members are also required to attend AmeriCorps trainings and events, and complete reflection logs, data reports, and program evaluations.

In total, about 150 hours of the member’s 1,700 hours will be devoted to activities unique to AmeriCorps, and the balance will be dedicated to the site partner’s advocacy activities. Host organizations should be mindful of these responsibilities, and must ensure a manageable client caseload in order for members to comply with AmeriCorps rules. Members have some flexibility to build in vacation and sick time, and most members have no trouble serving 1,700 hours in the 46 week timeframe.

### **What are the benefits the AmeriCorps member receives for participating?**

Members expect to participate in a hands-on, supervised exposure to the practice of poverty law which they can leverage towards the next steps in their career. In exchange for a full term of service, members also receive a taxable living stipend of \$21,500; health insurance; a \$5,815 education award upon completion of service; child care assistance, if eligible; and the ability to place eligible student loans in forbearance with interest paid upon completion of service.

## What are the program limitations?

AmeriCorps places some restrictions on what AmeriCorps members can do, and ALA-Massachusetts provides guidance to site partners on these issues throughout the program year. Most important, during service hours AmeriCorps members cannot engage in political activities, including elections for public office, voter registration drives, or advocating for any change in legislation or regulations. Members also cannot participate in union or religious activities, and cannot displace existing staff or volunteers. For more information, see 45 C.F.R. § 2520.65.

## What does ALA-Massachusetts provide to site partners?

ALA-Massachusetts program staff provides site partners with critical support to ensure the success of each placement, including:

- Coordination of recruitment, selection, and placement of AmeriCorps members;
- Onboarding and exiting members;
- Management of member stipend payroll and health insurance;
- Member time and datakeeping;
- Training, monitoring, and reporting to ensure each site partner is in compliance with AmeriCorps requirements;
- Communications, grant writing, grant reporting, and program evaluation;
- Support and training for supervisors;
- Assistance to site partners and members in resolving any disputes that arise;
- Career advice, mentoring, and support to members and alumni; and
- Implementation of a training curriculum for members (including access for members to attend three MCLE trainings).

## Important Dates

December 20, 2016:	Notice of Intent to Apply <a href="https://alamassachusetts.wufoo.com/forms/z1vpiao30lpzaea/">https://alamassachusetts.wufoo.com/forms/z1vpiao30lpzaea/</a>
January 3, 2017:	ALA-Massachusetts releases Partner Application
<b>February 3, 2017:</b>	Partner Application Due
February 24, 2017:	ALA-Massachusetts selects and notifies partners
March, 2017 - July, 2017:	Member application and interview process
<b>July 14, 2017:</b>	Member selection process completed
September, 2017:	Site partner contracts signed
September 8, 2017:	Supervisor Orientation
September 11, 2017:	First day of service, Member contracts signed

## Questions?

Contact Amy Copperman, Program Director, at 508.638.0150.