



UServeUtah Strategic Plan 2024-2026

*Engaging all Utahns in solving community needs through
national service, volunteerism, and community engagement.*

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Cover: AmeriCorps NCCC members serving in Utah.
Below: Volunteers with Animal Care of Davis County during 9/11 Day of Service & Remembrance. Project funding provided by UServeUtah.



Dear Friends in Service,

I am thrilled to share with you this strategic plan that will guide UServeUtah’s work for the next three years. Many of you were involved in the shaping of this plan and we thank you for taking the public survey, joining us on the listening tour, and giving us your invaluable feedback about needs in our state. It is our hope that you will see yourself in this plan, and find ways that you can join our mission of solving community needs through national service, volunteerism, and community engagement.

One of our new priorities included in this plan is addressing mental health concerns in our communities. Recognizing the increasing importance of mental well-being, we have outlined goals and strategies to provide support, resources, and awareness to help those who face mental health challenges.

Additionally, this plan seeks to address the pressing issue of housing access. Through collaborative efforts with local partners statewide, our priority is to enhance housing accessibility and opportunities for organizations and individuals to further address this need through service and volunteerism.

Lastly, this plan emphasizes institutionalizing service statewide. Over the next three years we will strive to engage Utahns at all stages of life and from all walks of life to be engaged in their communities. Programming will target youth in high school, young adults in higher education, seniors, and all who qualify to serve with AmeriCorps.

We are eager to begin this next chapter and to see the positive impact that will be made in our state. Together, we look forward to achieving our vision of resilient and connected communities where all Utahns are actively engaged and united through service.

With gratitude,

Loggins Merrill
Director, UServeUtah



Organizational Overview

UServeUtah, the state’s commission on service and volunteerism, was created by state statute in 1994 and is led by 20 commission members representing local government, community-based organizations, and statewide networks and is supported by a small staff. The mission of UServeUtah is to engage all Utahns in solving local needs through national service, volunteerism, and community engagement. National service and community engagement are key components of our work.

National Service

National service refers to AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps is the federal agency for national service and volunteerism. AmeriCorps provides opportunities for Americans of all backgrounds to serve their country, address the nation’s most pressing challenges, and improve lives and communities. Opportunities to serve with AmeriCorps include AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps Seniors programs.

UServeUtah manages the Utah AmeriCorps State program portfolio consisting of programs that address needs in the areas of economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship, disaster preparedness, healthy futures, and veterans and military families. UServeUtah provides administrative, fiscal, and programmatic oversight as well as technical assistance and program development.

Community Engagement

UServeUtah seeks to establish a strong infrastructure to promote service and volunteerism. We actively promote civic engagement and look for opportunities to help integrate a culture of service and volunteerism in all aspects throughout the state.

The community engagement initiatives raise awareness of the positive effects of volunteerism and provide high quality volunteer/educational opportunities that encourage individuals to be engaged members of their community. We help individuals identify their pathway of service, provide opportunities for people to serve and have a strong focus for youth and young adult engagement. We also find ways to recognize the service given by individuals and groups to help further promote ways people can give back to their community.

Left: Volunteers participating in the United Way Day of Caring, 2021.





Our Mission

The mission of UServeUtah is to engage all Utahns in solving community needs through national service, volunteerism, and community engagement.

Our Vision

One Utah. We envision resilient and connected communities where all Utahns are actively engaged and united through service.

Our Values

-  **People:** We value people and foster communities where all can engage in national service and volunteerism to address local needs.
-  **Impact:** We are committed to implementing innovative and effective programming and strategies with measurable impact.
-  **Creating capacity for all Utahns to engage:** We recognize that people of all ages, abilities, and origins can make lasting contributions by being actively engaged in their communities and are committed to bringing resources and programming to all communities and improving access to the resources needed to fully engage in national service and volunteerism.
-  **Collaboration:** As the state’s central coordinating agency for service and volunteerism, we are uniquely positioned to bring together individuals, neighborhoods, schools, businesses, government, nonprofit, faith-based and other community organizations to achieve a common vision of communities united through service.

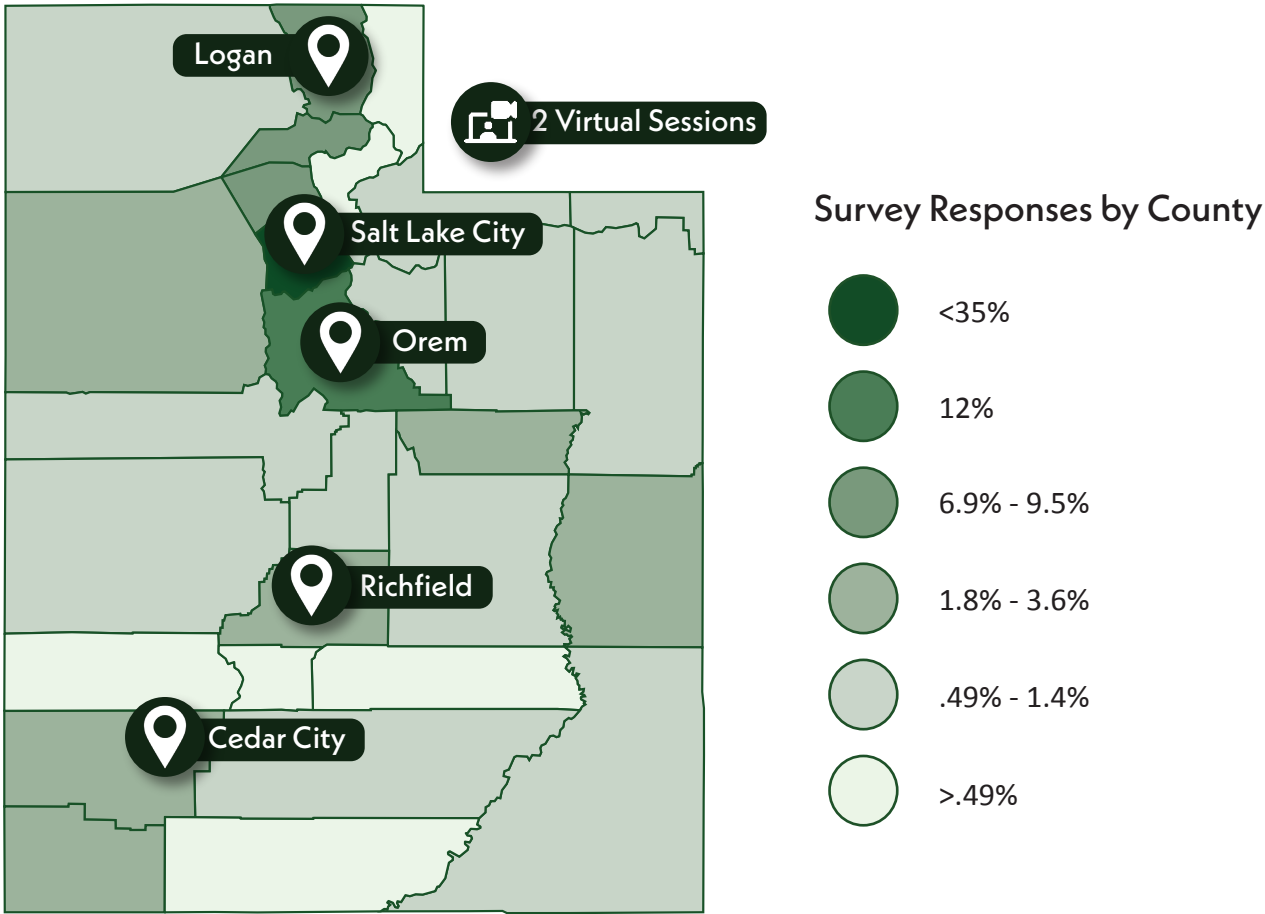


Plan Overview

As a state service commission, UServeUtah is governed by the Serve America Act which mandates all commissions develop and annually update a statewide plan for service covering a three-year period. This plan will guide our work from 2024-2026.

Plan Development

Through a public listening tour and survey, UServeUtah gathered data from across the state to develop an understanding of current volunteerism efforts, barriers to engaging in service, and critical community needs. The public survey gathered 639 responses in which every county in the state was represented. A total of seven listening tour sessions were conducted including in-person sessions in Logan, Salt Lake, Cedar City, and Richfield. Two virtual sessions were held via Zoom, and one in-person session was held at the Native American Summit in Orem. Participants in the listening tour represented nonprofit agencies, businesses, AmeriCorps programs, as well as students and community volunteers.



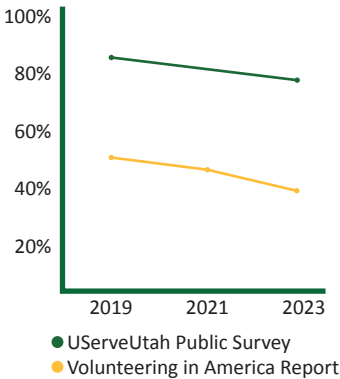
Left: AmeriCorps members serving with the Utah Conservation Corps.

Key Findings

Rates of volunteer engagement have decreased

"[Because of] the pandemic there's definitely a wrench that's gotten thrown in that whole ethic of collaboration and then throw on this whole new world of working remotely. It's easier to get in our silos and not collaborate."
-Anonymous survey response, 2023

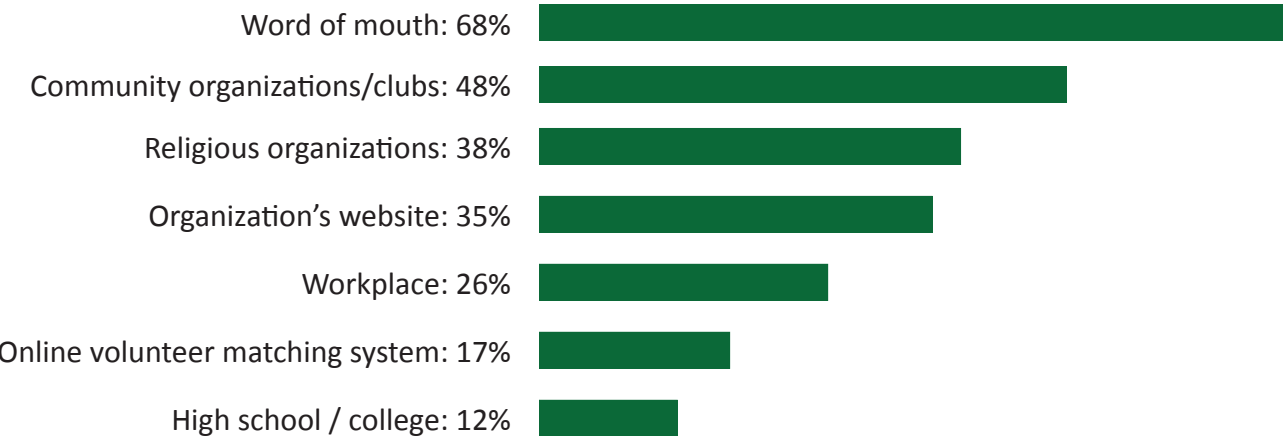
Service is a bedrock element of Utah's culture. However, data shows that rates of volunteer engagement across the state have decreased in recent years. Seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated that they actively volunteer in their community, down from 83% in the 2019 Public Opinion Survey. Additionally, the survey results showed a decrease in the number of AmeriCorps members serving more than one year. Reports from the listening sessions also indicated this decrease in volunteerism is felt across the state in organizations that rely heavily on volunteers to carry out their core programming and services within the community.



How Utahns find volunteer opportunities

"Maybe we don't know about opportunities because our society relies on technology so much to get the word out about opportunities."
-Anonymous survey response, 2023

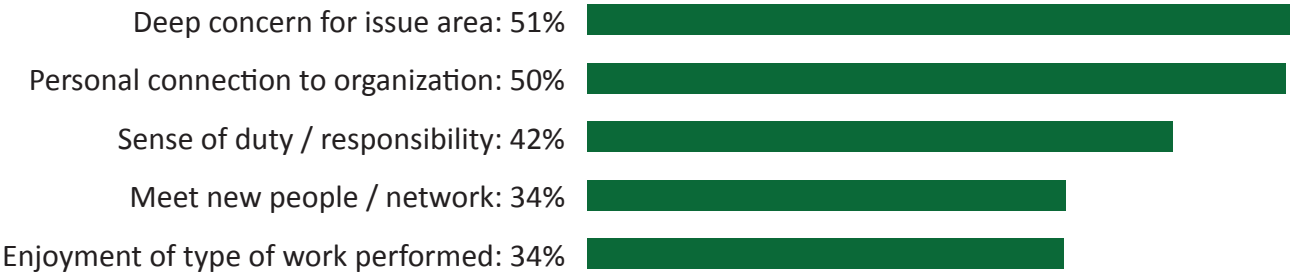
The most common ways that respondents find volunteer opportunities are word of mouth (68%) followed by community organizations/clubs (48%) and religious organizations as third most utilized at 38%. Only 17% indicated using an online volunteer matching system. This illustrates the powerful role that local networks and personal relationships play in Utah's volunteerism culture. Additionally, for this multi-select survey question, there was an average of three choices selected per person, indicating that it is common for an individual to use several methods to learn about service opportunities.



Top motivations for volunteering

"I know people connect with people. They don't connect with an organization. Being able to have ways to talk to people one-on-one or in groups. Social media cannot replace meeting one-on-one. We are seeing that more than ever before because that face-to-face was removed for a while and now we're back at it."
-Anonymous survey response, 2023

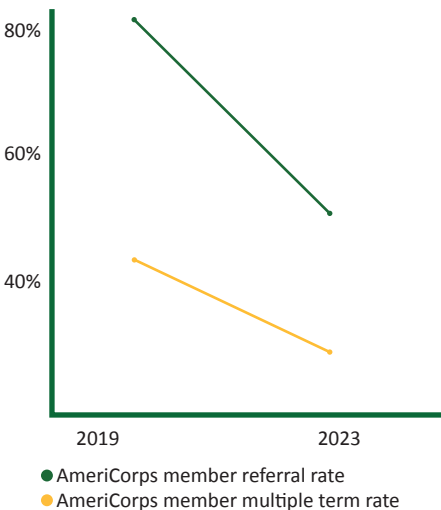
The three most common motivations for volunteering among survey respondents are 1- deep concern for the issue area, 2- a personal connection to the organization, and 3- a sense of duty or responsibility. These results are consistent with the 2019 survey results. Uniquely among youth ages 13-24, the top motivations were 1- meeting new people and 2- gaining experience to further career/ make career decisions. Listening tour participants reported that some of the high-value benefits of service are its ability to strengthen our social bonds and open-mindedness as well as creating a sense of purpose and belonging.



Renewal rates have decreased for AmeriCorps members serving multiple terms

"Families are moving away because of the impact of housing. Where do you go to make decent money? We don't provide that here. If you want to make money, you have to go to a different city. That leaves the elderly vulnerable because we don't have our children here with us."
-Anonymous survey response, 2023

In the 2019 Public Opinion survey, 94% of respondents agreed that AmeriCorps and National Service were effective methods to address community needs in Utah. Current data shows, however, that both referral rates and member renewal rates have decreased. Of the respondents who have been AmeriCorps members, only 29% completed more than one year of service, down from 43% in 2019. Additionally, only half have referred family and/or friend(s) to the AmeriCorps program, compared to 80% in 2019. Internal data from existing AmeriCorps programs indicate member recruitment and retention are being impacted by a variety of shifts in Utah's economic landscape including access to affordable housing.



Priorities

Our priorities align with the priorities of AmeriCorps and the One Utah Roadmap. Our work brings valuable resources to every corner of our state and invites all to be part of the solution to local needs.

Priorities of AmeriCorps:

- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Environmental Stewardship
- Disaster Preparedness
- Healthy Futures
- Veterans and Military Families

Priorities of the One Utah Roadmap:

- Economic Advancement
- Education
- Rural Issues
- Healthy Security
- Equity and Opportunity
- State Government Efficiency

In reviewing the listed priorities as well as the top unmet needs identified in the Public Opinion survey and in person listening sessions, the top three areas of focus and objectives for UServeUtah for 2024 - 2026 will be:

- Mental health
- Housing access
- Institutionalizing service throughout the state



Above: UServeUtah Youth Council member Carolyn Marlin (lower center) poses with project volunteers for her organization, Bags of Love Utah.

Mental Health

Goal: Research and share information on the positive mental health benefits of service and volunteerism.

- **Strategy:** Partner with Higher Education to gather and/or create research regarding the positive impacts of service.
- **Strategy:** Share the research both broadly and intentionally with partners.

Goal: Improving physical, mental, and behavioral health through service.

- **Strategy:** Prioritize grant funding opportunities for those that promote mental health.
- **Strategy:** Improve social integration and healthy connections of youth and young adults by promoting opportunities for service in high school and higher education.
- **Strategy:** Decrease isolationism and increase connections with older adults throughout the state through service.

Goal: Increase types of and reach of mental health resources to those engaged in service and volunteerism.

- **Strategy:** Provide mental health counseling services to those engaged in national service and volunteerism.
- **Strategy:** Increase mental health resources to rural Utah through service-centric programming.

Left: Volunteers serving with Lifting Hands International on 9/11 Day of Service & Remembrance. Project funding provided by UServeUtah.

Housing Access

Goal: Prioritize expanding access to housing through UServeUtah programming and initiatives.

- **Strategy:** Prioritize grant funding opportunities that expand access to housing as well as those providing support to vulnerable families facing housing challenges.
- **Strategy:** Support nonprofits and community organizations to enhance their ability to serve individuals facing housing challenges.

Goal: Increase services aimed to support and stabilize families and individuals to remain in housing and divert them from homelessness.

- **Strategy:** Partner with housing agencies and organizations to identify areas that service and volunteerism can serve as a solution.
- **Strategy:** Use service to support housing navigation.

Goal: Increase the amount and types of housing available through service and volunteerism.

- **Strategy:** Identify partners in this space and collaborate to find ways that service can be a solution to housing availability.
- **Strategy:** Promote and recognize efforts in this area to help increase participation.

Institutionalizing service throughout the state

Goal: Provide opportunities for young people to participate in national service and community engagement, and recognize them for the impacts they make through service.

- **Strategy:** Increase awareness of AmeriCorps and the benefits of participating in national service.
- **Strategy:** Support service learning in public education.
- **Strategy:** Recognize the contributions of youth in Utah through formal recognition.

Goal: Provide opportunities for Utahns age 55+ to participate in national service and community engagement, and recognize them for the impacts they make through service.

- **Strategy:** Increase awareness of AmeriCorps Seniors and the benefits of participating.
- **Strategy:** Educate organizations that utilize volunteers on how to engage Utah’s senior population.
- **Strategy:** Recognize the contributions of seniors in Utah through formal recognition.

Goal: Increase collaboration and partnerships with government agencies, educational institutions, faith based organizations and nonprofits to identify ways to institutionalize service throughout the state.

- **Strategy:** Increase collaboration with institutions of Higher Education to engage more young adults in service.
- **Strategy:** Support workforce development opportunities for those engaged in national service programs to facilitate the transition to education and employment.
- **Strategy:** Promote opportunities for service that bring diverse groups together to address and solve community issues.

Goal: Identify and address barriers to participation in national service and volunteerism in order to increase rates of participation.

- **Strategy:** Increase benefits to serving as an AmeriCorps member to increase and diversify members serving in Utah
- **Strategy:** Provide training that builds capacity in both the corporate and nonprofit sector to decrease barriers including workplace volunteerism, rural/remote volunteer opportunities, and diverse populations.
- **Strategy:** Measure the impact of service to help show volunteers the difference they are making in solving issues
- **Strategy:** Innovate new ways people can serve while navigating known challenges and barriers.



Left: AmeriCorps members serving with Community Rebuilds in Moab, UT.



Your Place in the Plan

We are excited to see where the next three years take us, and we know that we cannot get there alone. We hope you will join us as we engage all Utahns in solving local needs through national service, volunteerism, and community engagement.

Some ways you can participate and get started in national service & volunteerism include:

- Take the Community Engagement Pathways survey to find more ways to serve. Visit userve.utah.gov/pathways to get started.
- Explore the AmeriCorps fit finder and find an AmeriCorps program to join or support. Visit americorps.gov/serve/fit-finder
- Learn more about AmeriCorps programs in Utah by visiting userve.utah.gov/americorps.
- Join National Service Day on the Hill.
- Find a volunteer opportunity, bring a friend and tell a friend. Visit userve.utah.gov/volunteer to get involved.
- Join a Utah Board or Commission. Visit boards.utah.gov.

For more information about our work and progress, please visit userve.utah.gov/strategic-plan.



UServeUtah

Utah Commission on Service & Volunteerism