



## **Military Families Service Corps: An Interagency Partnership Between AmeriCorps and the Department of Defense**

### **Background**

A Military Families Service Corps (MFSC) is a national service concept that could meet urgent community needs at military installations while also helping to address the issue of military spouse and family member unemployment and under-employment. Moreover, the MFSC would build on the service that military families are already doing, and thus serve as an acknowledgement of the service and volunteerism already occurring in communities worldwide. The 2018 NDAA instructed the Department of Defense to undertake a feasibility study for the creation of an MFSC, which resulted in the recommendations in line with the description below.

### **Creation of the Military Families Service Corps and Pilot Program Ownership**

No further statutory authorization is needed to initiate and stand up this initiative. Instead, the Secretary of Defense could first establish a pilot Military Family Service Corps in partnership with AmeriCorps at the Corporation for National and Community Service through an interagency agreement. Organization and management of the Corps could be established in one of the military departments as an executive agent or overseen and operated out of a secretariat that reports to the Office of the Secretary of Defense — such as Military Community and Family Policy (MCFP) within Personnel and Readiness. An alternative option would be to create a Department-level council composed of a designee of each military service secretary, liaisons from AmeriCorps and others as appropriate who would be charged with oversight and advice to the Secretary of Defense and to the Service Secretaries, and reporting annually to the congressional military committees.

### **Participation & Impact**

Corps members (military spouses and adult children to the age of 26) could focus on areas of impact selected from a list of options drawn from a survey of need in the military community and the community within and surrounding the installation to be ultimately determined by the installation commander.

Potential areas of impact could include:

- Spouse career support
- Transition support for service members and families joining or leaving the military
- Food security and nutrition assistance
- Mental health and wellness
- Acting as a liaison with local schools with military children as students
- Supporting families with children of special needs
- Warrior Transition Unit support
- Organizing volunteers, such as those earning the Volunteer Service Medal
- Creating morale, welfare and recreation activities for the installation

The corps members would then work with their affiliated unit's commander to design an experience based on the specific needs of the installation.

### **Example Program Model**

One potential program model option is a navigator model, which could train military spouses and dependent young adults to help military service members and their families better access resources to strengthen food security on installations. National service corps members have a long history of working to address food insecurity in communities, helping individuals and families understand and access their eligibility for SNAP and other supportive resources, through a variety of program models including USDA's Anti-Hunger and Opportunity Corps as well as through AmeriCorps programs like Food Corps, which offer nutrition education and healthy school meals to students across the country. Leadership within MCFP could identify installations where food insecurity is particularly prevalent and could benefit from better access to basic needs and school nutrition programs. In consultation with AmeriCorps, the Department of Defense would identify national service programs to deliver evidence-based interventions aligned with the needs of pilot communities. Programs will be reimbursed for services provided to pilot communities and schools.

### **Corps Member Experience and Benefits**

All positions will be national service positions, with a term of not less than 1,200 hours, earning an "education award only" since housing and other living expenses are already covered for military family members. Flexibility would be built in for military family service corps members who relocate to other installations that would enable them to complete their service term. Corps members who serve and complete the requirements of the corps will be eligible for a national service educational award equivalent to the value of the Pell grant at the completion of their service, which is currently \$7,395 pre-tax, in FY2023. Corps members would not lose access to any pre-existing TRICARE health benefits they already receive, but would be able to

opt-in to the AmeriCorps grantee or VISTA health insurance should that be of interest. We anticipate that the majority of corps members would already be covered by TRICARE or TRICARE Young Adult, so the need for additional health coverage would likely be limited.

### **Resource Impact**

The Department of Defense would provide resources for the pilot program. AmeriCorps would provide resources for corps members' education awards through the National Service Trust Fund, and any health insurance that corps members opt into.