

SURVIVING YOUR SERVICE YEAR

No matter where you are in your service year, it's never too late to learn tips for not only surviving, but thriving while living on a stipend. Life on a service year stipend can be one of the most challenging aspects of doing a service year, but with some discipline and these tips below, you can feel confident about your preparation and dedicate more energy to getting things done and making an impact!

CREATING A BUDGET

Though it may seem daunting at first, [creating a budget](#) and sticking to it as best as you can will help you make the best use of your stipend and will alleviate a lot of stress. It is also important to consider finances for your post-service year transition as you plan for potential gaps in employment, moving to a new place (or staying where you served!), or becoming a student.

RELOCATION AND HOUSING

[Housing](#) is likely the largest expense you will face during your service year, often between 25% to 50% of your income. If your program does not offer housing and you cannot live with family or friends, consider roommates. Don't be afraid to ask your program for housing recommendations if you are relocating.

COMMUTING

[Transportation to and from your service year](#), as well as for your own personal needs, is another major cost. Having your own car is expensive – with maintenance, insurance, and payments – so consider using mass transit, carpooling, or ridesharing if they are available in your area. These options are also environmentally conscious to boot!

EATING ON A STIPEND

Plan to cook your meals at home and bring your lunch to [make the most of your money](#). Have a list and a meal plan when you go to the grocery store to make sure you only purchase items that you will use. See if you are eligible for SNAP benefits on your stipend, and if you are participating in an AmeriCorps program, bring proper documentation. Only eat out for special occasions, and limit drinks – they add to the tab fast!

STUDENT LOANS SUPPORT

Many service years offer a [student loans support](#) through an education award, which can be applied to student debt or future education expenses. Additionally, many service year corps members are eligible for loan deferment or forbearance while they are serving.

LIFESTYLE

[Doing a service year and living on a budget](#) doesn't have to stop you from having fun! Have fun on the cheap in your community by joining a fitness group, going to local events, and hosting potlucks with your service year friends.

CREATING A BUDGET

There are many tips to manage your finances, but while doing a service year, you will need some practical budgeting techniques to keep you afloat. Adopt these useful tips now to make the most of your stipend and learn skills you can use beyond your service year.

BUDGETING 101:

This may seem obvious, but here it is: if you don't know where you are spending your money, you don't have control over it. Whether you are earning a service year stipend or a six-figure salary, knowing all of your expenses and making sure they are within your income – aka, having a budget – is the foundation of a financially-sound life. The [Guide to Budgeting](#) from The Balance is a great place to start for newbies!

FIGURE OUT YOUR INCOME:

The first step of making a budget is figuring out your income. Apart from your service year stipend, you may have other forms of income from side-jobs or other sources. Remember that you should use your post-tax amount when planning for the amount you have to spend in your budget. Also, decide on the timeframe for which you are creating a budget. Many people have monthly bills but get paid bi-weekly, so keep that in mind when determining your expenses vs. income.

FIND A BUDGET SYSTEM:

There are many different ways to organize a budget, and one is not necessarily better than another – it's just important find the one that works for you! Here are some examples of budget systems, templates, and apps that might help you create budget.

APPS/WEBSITES:

- [Mint](#) (free)
- [Wally](#) (free)
- [YouNeedABudget](#) (low cost)

BUDGET SYSTEMS

- [The 50-30-20 Rule](#)
- [Six Ways to Budget Your Money](#)
- [Basic Budgeting Tips Everyone Should Know](#)

IF THIS ALL SEEMS OVERWHELMING, WE SUGGEST STARTING WITH A SIMPLE LINE-ITEM BUDGET:

- Start by figuring out your [post-tax income](#).
- List out your expenses each month - some are fixed like rent and loan payments, while others are variable like groceries and entertainment. Don't forget to add in savings!
- Check that your income is greater than all of your expenses. Adjust if necessary by lowering your estimates for spending on "wants."
- At the end of the month, see where you actually spent your money. Did you go over or under in a category? Surprised how

much you spend on coffee? Use this info to help you adjust your budget for the next month – it may take a little while to get the hang of it.

- Pat yourself on the back! Starting is the hardest part, so you're doing great!

EXPENSES YOU SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN CREATING YOUR BUDGET:

ESSENTIALS:

These are expenses that you absolutely cannot live without, such as, but not limited to:

- Rent/Mortgage
- Utilities
- Food (groceries - not eating out!)
- Transportation
- Cell phone
- Minimum monthly loan and/or credit card payments
- Insurance (health, home, car, etc.)
- Any other essential bills
- [Child expenses](#)/family obligations
- Pet expenses

OTHER FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS:

Welcome to a crash course on #adulting! Before you get overwhelmed by all the money you should be saving, remember this doesn't all have to happen during your service year. Paying down debts and saving for future needs and wants should be factored into your monthly expenses in the long run, but consider starting now to save even a little bit per paycheck – you will thank yourself later.

- Tuition or Student loan payments (beyond the minimum amount in "essentials")
- Other Loan and Credit card payments (beyond the minimum amount in "essentials")
- Emergency fund (see details below!)
- 401K/IRA/Roth IRA (aka Retirement! It might not apply during your service year, but do some [research on the basics](#) so you'll know options for the future.)
- Health Savings Account
- Investments
- Savings for future housing purchases, travel, and vacations
- Savings for whatever else is important to you!

PERSONAL CHOICES:

These are expenses each month that help you have a comfortable and happy life, though you could live without when you need to save money. Look over your last month or two to see where you spend your money on average – it might surprise you how fast the little things add up!

- Gym membership
- New clothes, shoes, or household goods





- Netflix, cable, music streaming, and other entertainment subscriptions
- Membership fees to Amazon or other subscription services
- Take-out & restaurants
- Coffee shops
- Alcohol & bars
- Social events & other forms of entertainment
- Gifts (reminder to factor in holidays!)
- Travel
- Electronics (we know you want that new iPhone!)
- Convenience services like Uber, house cleaning, grocery delivery, etc.

OTHER IMPORTANT FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

EMERGENCY FUND

If you don't have one already, set up an [emergency fund](#). Many experts recommend having an emergency fund of 3-6 months of paychecks in savings in case a major life event or emergency happens. While this often is difficult to do on a stipend, put away as much as you can now, and then continue to build it over time. It is also important to consider finances for your post-service year transition as you plan for potential gaps in employment, moving to a new place (or staying where you served!), or becoming a student.

TAXES

Tax season will most likely hit at some point during your service year, and taxes are typically due on April 15th. While taxes vary from state to state, here is a quick crash course to get you started:

- Check out the [free federal tax preparation](#) available if you made under \$64,000 last year.
- Seek out resources like the [IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance \(VITA\)](#) which offer free tax help for taxpayers who qualify. Additionally, [AARP offers tax aid](#).
- If you have any concerns, set up an appointment to speak with a tax accountant about your finances.

SAVE WITH DISCOUNTS

Access member discounts if you join [AmeriCorps Alums](#) at Service Year Alliance after your service year. You can also check out an up-to-date listing of [Alums discounts](#). Some of these discounts are available to currently serving service year corps members, too.

If you are currently a student or if you are going back to school after your service year, always check to see if there is a [student discount](#) you can use before making a purchase! From tech companies to clothing stores, many places offer discounts just for being a student.

A FINAL NOTE:

Creating and sticking to a budget is not easy. Think about what you absolutely need – especially during your service year, you may have to make some sacrifices. Though it might not be fun to decline an invite to dinner or miss a concert you've been wanting to see, sticking to your budget will help you be less stressed, and so much happier, throughout your service year and after.

CHECK OUT MORE RESOURCES TO [#SURVIVINGYOURSERVICEYEAR](#)

COMMUTING

Have you ever heard someone say they love their commute to work? If so, find out how that person is commuting and do what they do! Commuting can be a stressful part of the work day, but it doesn't have to be that way! Learn tips for saving money while commuting on your stipend and making your commute more fun.

FIND YOUR WAY

Commuting options drastically differ in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Start by asking your program how their staff gets to work everyday. They will be your best resource for figuring out the most efficient public transportation routes, biking and walking conditions, or parking options for your site.

DRIVING

For many places, a car is a necessity. If you need to drive, do what you can to cut costs!

- Consider carpooling to split the cost of driving with your ride-mates.
- [Maximize your MPG](#). The longer you sit idling in traffic, the more gas you burn, so test out alternative routes to avoid heavily congested areas.
- Try to minimize A/C Usage. If you are cruising under 60 mph, open your windows to cool down. Speeds over 60mph create excessive wind drag, so it's better to turn on the A/C.
- Find the cheapest gas. Use an [app to find the best gas prices](#), and join rewards programs to accumulate points to use for cents off the gallon later!

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

If you are live in a place that has public transportation, utilize it! Look to see what buses, trains, and ride-sharing options are in your area. Even if you have a car, public transportation may save your more money when compared to gas and parking costs. See if you can access a pre-tax transit pass or discounts through your site or local organizations.

BIKING

If you own a bike and you live close to work, you can commute for almost nothing! If not, [buying a bike](#) is a one time cost (plus occasional maintenance) that will save you money in the long run. Get healthy, save some money, and help the environment by cycling to work – just don't forget your helmet and be sure you don't skimp on your bike lock!

WALKING

If your job is within walking distance, skip the car and public transportation and walk to work. It's a great way to get a low impact workout in! 30 minutes of daily walking has incredible health benefits.

LOVE YOUR COMMUTE

Rather than sitting angrily in traffic, [start enjoying your commute](#). Download your favorite music, audio book, or a podcast before you start driving to avoid the temptation of using your smartphone behind the wheel. There isn't much you can do when stuck in traffic or driving, but try to change your mindset and start getting whatever enjoyment you can out of it. It won't really save you money, but it will help save your sanity.

EATING ON A STIPEND



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YEAR

Just because you are doing a service year doesn't mean you can't eat the way that you want! Learning how to make the most of your dollars when it comes to your meals is an important skill that will help you beyond your service year.

APPLY FOR SNAP BENEFITS

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families. SNAP distributes funds on a monthly Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card that can be used like a debit card to purchase food at authorized stores. Eligibility and benefit levels are based on household size, income, and other factors, and vary based on the state you live in. As a service year corps member, you can see if you are [eligible for SNAP](#) benefits and how to [apply](#) in your state. Applying for SNAP benefits takes some time, so if you decide to apply, do it as soon as you can. Often you can apply even before your service year begins. You may need to [bring proper documentation](#) if you are an AmeriCorps member.

OTHER SNAP NOTES:

- You can use SNAP benefits out of state, so remember that if you are traveling!
- Many food items at the grocery store are eligible to use SNAP benefits towards, but there are [some regulations](#). You cannot use benefits towards prepared food (like the hot bar in the grocery store), alcohol, or household supplies.

LEARN TO COOK AT HOME

Whether you're able to utilize SNAP benefits or not, learning how to cook at home is the biggest money-saver when it comes to food. Cooking takes practice, so whether you are the next Iron Chef or are still mastering Easy-Mac, give yourself some cooking goals! Start with what you know, and go from there.

- Learn some basic recipes to [get any beginner started](#).
- Check out [Good And Cheap by Leanne Brown](#), a cookbook to inspire you to plan healthy meals on a tight budget.
- Pinterest is a great source of cheap, easy-to-make meals— keep a board of recipes you'd like to try!

STOCK YOUR KITCHEN

Part of cooking at home is having the right tools to do so. Make a list of [essential kitchen supplies](#) you need, and then shop for the items you don't have. Splitting the costs of these items with roommates can help make furnishing your kitchen easier on all of you. If an item is more expensive, but you will use it every day, it's likely [worth investing](#) in a quality tool. Make sure to thrift for high quality used items before paying full price for it at your local box store!

WHERE TO SHOP

Shop at discounted grocery stores to save money! [Aldi](#), [Lidl](#), [WinCo](#), and [Walmart](#) are good places to get groceries at a reasonable price. You can even purchase grocery staples at your local dollar store. Trader Joe's also has some good prices!

- Check your areas to see if there are any [farmers markets](#)! Some have deals for SNAP recipients or have deals if you show up right before closing. Also, [some farmers markets, co-ops, and CSAs](#) allow you to volunteer and they will pay you with produce.
- [Shop seasonally](#)! Produce in season will always be the cheapest.

MORE TIPS TO SUCCESSFUL GROCERY SHOPPING TRIPS:

- Go armed with a list and stick to it. By planning ahead, you can make your shopping list based on what you already have and what you want to eat so that you know what you still need to buy. Don't forget a calculator or use your phone to track your running total.
- Always avoid shopping hungry! By shopping when you are full, you have a better chance of following your shopping list and buying fewer snacks or items you don't usually buy.
- Look at deals that your favorite grocery store has for the week and plan meals and snacks around what's on sale. Cut coupons from flyers or download apps to see the weekly coupons or sales.
- Many foods can be frozen and then thawed when you are ready to cook or eat it. By freezing food before it goes bad, you will be able to save money in the long run.
- Cook once, eat forever! Plan meals that make leftovers for lunch the next day, or freeze leftovers for a quick meal another day.
- Some foods may be cheaper for you to buy in bulk, like meat, cheese, and grains such as rice and oats.
- Have roommates? Pool your groceries and make bigger meals together. Even if it's just a couple days out of the week – a shared dinner can create a lot of leftovers AND save everyone some scratch!

EATING OUT

Eating out can be a special treat! Make the most of your money by looking for specials (happy hour food deals are a great money saver!), splitting costs with your service year friends, or using other tips to save money while eating out.

Since we do a lot of socializing around meals, it might feel like your only option to see people is by eating out. Try organizing a potluck instead! Everyone can chip in with supplies they already have at home, and you can make a cost-friendly meal. Also, it's totally fine to be honest that you are trying to save money, and suggest coffee or dessert or another activity instead of meeting up for dinner with a friend.

COFFEE

The average cup of coffee costs around \$0.16 to make at home, yet coffee can cost over \$3 if you buy it out. For the same cost of buying coffee out for a week, you could invest in a coffee maker or french press (check your thrift store first!) to make coffee for pennies each day. If hot coffee isn't your thing, try out making your own cold brew coffee. If you own a K-cup coffee maker, buy a reusable k-cup to save more money than using single use coffee pods.



LIFESTYLE



Live your best life when doing your service year! Being thrifty and resourceful doesn't mean you can't have fun!

FURNISHING YOUR SPACE

If you are moving and need some items for your new space, save money by purchasing necessities second-hand online or at thrift stores. Sometimes you can find high quality stuff at a much lower price and can even negotiate. Pro tip: travel to affluent neighborhoods and check out those thrift stores – you may find even nicer quality items! Sometimes, these nicer items even make it to the curb on garbage days. One person's trash can be another's treasure! For things you need to buy new, it might be worth investing in nicer pieces that will last you longer, but if that isn't an option, check your local dollar store to find essentials like mixing bowls or cooking utensils for a low price.

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL WARDROBE

If you don't have a uniform for your service year and have to wear professional clothing, there are plenty of ways to save money when expanding your wardrobe! Look for timeless basics that can be worn with different outfits and that you can dress up or down.

- Make thrift stores your best friend! Using the same logic as with furnishing your space, you can often find great deals on items you would pay hundreds for elsewhere at places like [Goodwill](#), [Buffalo Exchange](#), and [Salvation Army](#). Make it a fun outing with your service year friends – if nothing else, you'll get some good laughs trying on some of the 80s prom dresses!
- If you prefer online shopping or don't have any thrift stores near you, websites like [Poshmark](#), [Tread Up](#), and [Mercari](#) are great options to buy clothes at a discounted rate.
- Check out off-priced retail like Marshalls, TJMaxx, and Ross. You can find similar items to those sold at normal retailers but for a fraction of the cost.

EXERCISE

We all know how important exercising is, and luckily, it does not need to cost much!

- Find free workout videos by searching on YouTube or Pinterest.
- Running and hiking is free to do and gets you outdoors! If you like doing these activities with others, you can often find groups to join who get together for these activities.
- See if your local Parks & Rec or YMCA has free or reduced classes or workout equipment to use.
- Lots of yoga and other fitness centers offer a free class or a free week to test out that kind of workout. You often can test out a bunch of different classes around your area without having to commit to a year long contract. You may also have access to public or free outdoor classes you can participate in. Yoga in the park, anyone?
- Looking for a tough workout? See if the [November Project](#) is near you! You'll meet new people and get a killer work out in as well.
- Don't forget to pick a great [Spotify playlist](#) to accompany you! If you don't pay for a music streaming service, [Pandora workout station](#) or [YouTube](#) both have free workout playlists, too.



ENTERTAINMENT

There are endless opportunities to find things to do at little-to-no cost. Be open to trying out new things!

SOME LOW-COST ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS:

- Join listservs to get notice of free concerts, festivals, and other events in your area. You can even go old school and read a newspaper for upcoming events. Your local library is a great source of information as well!
- Can't afford to go to that event or concert? Try volunteering for a shift. You help out for a bit, sometimes get free food or swag, and once you are done you can get in for free and be able to enjoy your time after your shift is complete.
- If you are a movie person, consider joining [MoviePass](#). For just under \$10 a month you are able to go to unlimited movies a month! Make sure theaters in your area allow you to use MoviePass before purchasing a membership.
- If you live in a college town, see if they have any fun free events! You may even be able to catch theater productions for very cheap.
- Some museums and zoos provide free or reduced admission several days throughout the month. If you're a frequent visitor, buying a pass might be a better option overall.
- Check out [Groupon](#) to save money on services, products, or events in your area.
- [Meetup](#) is a great way to find new people to do fun things, which is especially great if you relocated for your service year.
- Create your own fun. Invite over some friends and have a game night! Many libraries have board games that you can check out.

TREAT YO SELF

Though [going out to eat, grabbing coffee, and for going out for happy hour](#) probably shouldn't be regular part of your routine, sometimes you need a pick-me-up to get through a tough week! Make the most of your money by looking for specials, splitting costs with your service year friends, using coupons, or joining rewards programs or apps that earn you points for your purchases.

ANIMAL LOVERS UNITE!

If you are an animal lover but can't have a pet with you during your service year, consider different ways to get your dog and cat cuddles! [Volunteering at a local shelter or rescue group, pet sitting, or dog walking](#) are great ways to spend time with pets (and you might even make some extra money!).

PLAN A STAYCATION

If you are starting to get burned out and need of a vacation but can't afford to travel, planning a [staycation](#) might be the perfect thing for you. Find some time, maybe even take a three day weekend, to disconnect, relax, and prioritize all your [favorite things to do](#). That may involve having an all day movie marathon, hiking, or having a DIY spa day!

RELOCATION AND HOUSING



As another service year friend put it, "Relocating is always hard. You don't know anybody, you don't know what to do on a Friday night, and you have no idea how to get anywhere." Amen. Relocating looks different for everyone, but in no time you will be settled and #livingthedream.

GETTING THERE:

FLYING:

[Shopping for your flight](#) on a Tuesday and being flexible about your [travel dates](#) are both great considerations to keep in mind when booking travel. Tuesdays are the most inexpensive day of the week to buy flights! It also can help to use the [incognito mode](#) on your web browser to help score the cheapest deals. Consider using deal-finding apps and websites like [Hopper](#), [Skiplagged](#), and [Airfarewatchdog](#). [Google flights](#) is also a good way [save money when booking your flight](#).

CONSIDER OTHER FORMS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION:

Look to see what forms of public transportation can get you to your new location. If there are options to take a bus or train, that may be cheaper than flying!

DRIVING:

Driving your own car or renting may be the best option if you have a lot of belongings you are planning to move with you, or if it is cheaper overall. Use a [cost of driving calculator](#) to estimate the cost of your trip, and if renting, don't forget to factor in total miles, fees, and insurance into the cost of your rental.

MOVING YOUR BELONGINGS:

Research a few options to move your items. You can look into shipping boxes, paying for extra suitcases while you travel, driving everything with you, or using a service like [Pod](#). If you know of another service year corps member who is also relocating to the same area, see if you can split costs. Pack light! Instead of paying to relocate all of your belongings, consider storage or leaving things at home or at a friend's place. This may be worth it if you are unsure if you want to permanently relocate to your new location after your service year. Sometimes, instead of moving everything, it might be cheaper to sell your things and buy new ones when you get to your new location, especially if your items were purchased used or from a discount store in the first place (Here's looking at you, Ikea and Craigslist!). If you currently live or are relocating to a college town or a transient city, you may save time and money in the long run.

STARTING YOUR HOUSING SEARCH

As soon as you have committed to your service year, [begin searching](#) for housing. Ask your program if they have any housing resources or suggestions and if they can connect you with any current service year corps members or alums who can give you tips. These service year connections are a great place to start when looking for potential roommates. You can also look up housing or AmeriCorps networking groups on Facebook or other platforms to find others who may be able to support with housing. Whether or not you can connect with a service year network, starting your housing hunt early will help you form realistic expectations of the typical housing options in your area, and some options may be open well in advance of your move. Make a list of your desired amenities and the type of living experience you want. Are you willing to pay more to be in the heart of downtown? Would you take a longer commute to have yard space? Figure out your needs and wants and start your search there.

Make sure you know your stipend early on. This will help determine your price range for housing, and remember to factor in utilities within that cost. Ideally, your total housing should be around 30% of your income, and no more than 50% – use our [budget guideline](#) to help you plan this out! might help you create budget.

WHERE TO SEARCH

Check out websites like [Zillow](#), [Apartments.com](#), [Padmapper](#), [Hotpads](#), or [abodo](#) to start your search. [Craigslist](#) is also a common option to find housing, especially if you are looking to live with roommates. Pro tip: It's never out of the question to ask for pictures or videos of the space. While a lack of images doesn't necessarily mean a post is a scam, often the most legitimate ones tend to include several pictures of the space.

ROOMMATES

If you can't find others serving to live with, you might consider looking for houses or apartments with extra rooms. If you can't make it to your new location before you need to sign a lease, set up a video call to gauge how you'll get along with your future roommates. [Prepare some questions](#) to ask your potential roommates to make sure you would be a good match. Whether you're living with friends or people who you are just meeting, it's important to [set expectations early](#) about your shared living situation. Figure out how you'd like to handle shared expenses and keeping your new place clean. [Ask about habits](#) and talk about what your expectations are for social situations. Some people are looking for roommates to be their new friends, while others are just looking for people that they can split bills with, so be honest about what you are looking for. Your schedule and your finances are probably among the most important considerations you'll want to keep in mind as you screen potential roommates.

WHEN VISITING AN APARTMENT:

If possible, visit before signing a lease. Turn on the faucets, make sure all burners on the stove work, flush the toilet, etc. – you might feel a little crazy, but it's better to know before you move in if anything needs to be fixed! [Ask a ton of questions](#) and bring a notebook to write everything down to avoid mixing up the details if you are seeing multiple places.

If you can't do the tour in person see if a friend in the area is able to tour for you. Pictures and videos of the exact apartment are a must if you cannot visit it in person!

BEFORE YOU SIGN THE LEASE:

Actually take the time to read the lease and make sure that the rules, maintenance process, vacancy notice, and any other terms discussed are included. Understand exactly who is responsible for utilities and how they are paid. [If anything is unclear, ask](#). Once you sign this lease, it is a legally binding document, so address any potential issues ahead of time.

MOVING WITH A PET

If you decide to bring your furry friend with you, make sure to factor them in early to your moving plans. Pet friendly spaces are critical, no matter what kind of pet you have. Make sure to check the lease to see if there are any restrictions over how many and what kind of animals are allowed. Many places charge an additional monthly fee on top of the rent if you have a pet living with you.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Do you need to find a place with a backyard for your pet?
- Is your new place near a dog park?
- Do you have a car to transport your animal to the vet?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO HELP IN MOVING A PET:

- [ASPCA: Moving with your Pet](#)
- [Moving with Pets: 10 Tips for Success](#)

UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

Once you move, remember that you will need to [change your address in many places](#). It should be among the [first things you do once you make it to your new place](#). Some of these changes, like updating your bank information, can often happen before you move, where other things like updating your drivers license often must be done in person in your new state's Department of Motor Vehicles.

MAKE IT YOUR HOME!

Congrats on moving in! Now that you have a new place, make it a place that you want to be. Furnish it with things that make you happy, and start to explore your new neighborhood. [Check out our guide to living it up in your new community!](#)



CHECK OUT MORE RESOURCES TO [#SURVIVINGYOURSERVICEYEAR](#)

STUDENT LOAN SUPPORT



Student loans are the #worst. We've been there with you. Living on a service year stipend while you have student loans might seem impossible, but it's likely you are eligible for options that will help you manage your loans and let you focus on what really matters – your service year!

PAUSE YOUR STUDENT LOAN PAYMENTS

There are two ways to temporarily pause your loans while you are doing your service year. By not having to pay towards your student loans while you are doing your service year, you'll have additional funds to help make ends meet.

LOAN FORBEARANCE

Service year corps members who have students loans may be [eligible for loan forbearance](#) during their service year. This is at the discretion of the lender. Student loan forbearance allows you to not make any payments on your student loans while you are serving. During this time, your student loans will still accrue interest. If you are an AmeriCorps member, you can make a forbearance request via your [AmeriCorps Portal homepage](#). If you choose to do multiple service years and are eligible for forbearance, you can opt to apply annually for loan forbearance.

LOAN DEFERMENT

Based on income, you may also be eligible for loan deferment. By deferring your loans instead of applying for forbearance, you will delay both your payments and interest accrual. This is at the discretion of your lender and you should contact them to inquire about the deferment option.

INCOME-DRIVEN PAYMENT PLANS

Based on your income, you may opt to sign up for a payment plan based on your income. Service year corps members living solely on the stipend may be eligible for very low, even \$0 loan payments. This is particularly helpful if you would like to meet the 10 year, 120 payments requirement of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

PUBLIC SERVICE LOAN FORGIVENESS

If you work in public service, you may be eligible to have your student loan debt cancelled through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. While on this program, you make 120 monthly loan payments over 10 years, and then any remaining loans after that time are forgiven. Payments do not have to be consecutive. Loan forbearance months do not count, but loan deferment months do. There are [special rules](#) that allow borrowers who are AmeriCorps members or Peace Corps volunteers to use their Segal Education Award or Peace Corps transition payment to make a single "lump sum" payment that may count for up to 12 qualifying PSLF payments.

AMERICORPS SEGAL EDUCATION AWARD

AmeriCorps members are often eligible for the [Segal Education Award](#) upon successful completion of a service year. Contact your program to see if you qualify. You can use your Education Award for seven years following the end of your service year. [The Education Award amount](#) can change every year based on the amount of the Pell Grant. While [private loans](#) cannot be paid

through your Education Award, you can apply it to most federal loans, however there are [some exceptions](#). Eligible loans, tuition, and educational costs at most universities can be paid with your award. All [requests must be made after completion](#) of your service year.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SEGAL EDUCATION AWARD

- [Some universities will match your education award or provide additional scholarship because of your service year](#). Please ask your university's financial aid office if you qualify.
- [VISTA members may opt out of the Education Award](#) to receive a post-service year cash stipend in place of the Education Award. VISTA members may also be eligible for up to 15% cancellation on certain types of loans. AmeriCorps VISTA members who choose to receive the Education Award are not eligible for this cancellation. You can not switch from the cash stipend to Education Award, but you can change from the Education Award to the cash stipend as long as the change occurs before your 10th month of service.
- Remember, when you use your education award, you must [claim it on your taxes as income](#) in the year that you use it. Because of this, you may want to consult a financial professional about the best way and timing to use your education award. Remember, you don't have to use it all at once.
- If you are going back to school, you can apply your education award to future tuition. You may only use a certain amount of your education award in one semester. To figure out how this impacts you specifically, contact your university. If your Education Award exceeds the cost of tuition you owe in one semester, you may be eligible for a reimbursement check through your institution's financial aid office.

INTEREST REPAYMENT REQUEST THROUGH THE SEGAL TRUST

If you selected the Education Award, you may be eligible to make an "interest repayment request" via your [AmeriCorps Portal homepage](#) once you have successfully completed your service year. This repayment is paid by the Segal Trust, and payments are in addition to your Education Award amount is not deducted from Education Award. You do not have to have put your loans in forbearance to make this request, but if you did, then you can have the accrued interest paid for up to 100%. Like your Education Award, this payment is also taxable income in the year it was used. You must have successfully completed your service year for this option to be available to you.

