



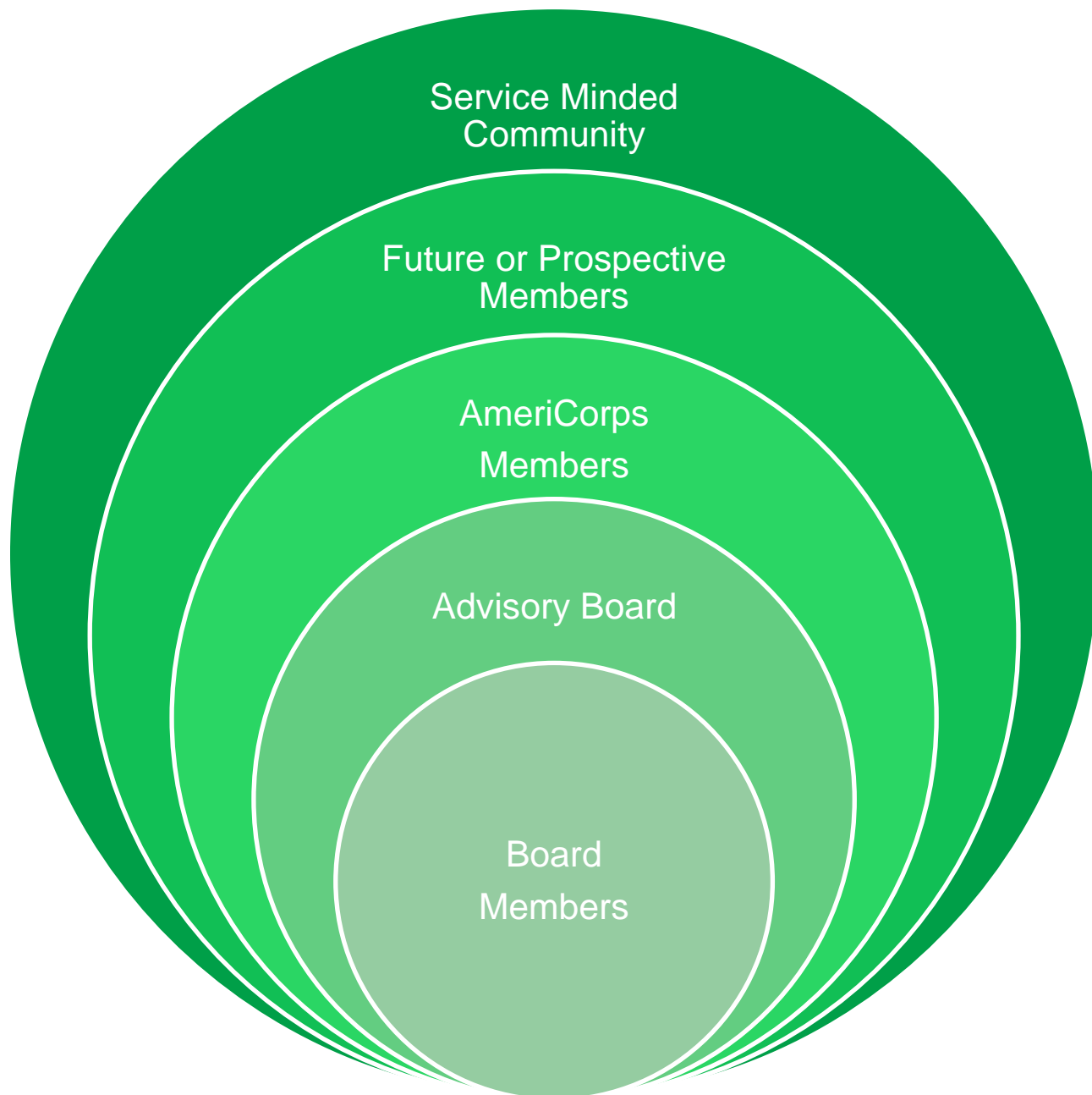
THE AMERICORPS COLLABORATIVE

A START-UP TOOLKIT

A start to finish guide to understand, develop and launch an AmeriCorps Collaborative in your area.

AMERICORPS COLLABORATIVE MODEL

AmeriCorps Collaborative Model



START-UP PROCESS

Start-Up Process



Catalyst Tools

Program staff and state commission staff have the power to connect, influence and nurture a Collaborative. We have developed a couple of tools to help you begin the start-up process.

Identifying a Leader

Leaders are the change agents who play a crucial role in starting a Collaborative. The leader will be the primary champion and organizer for the Collaborative, conducting outreach, strategically networking with potential partners, and developing a community of supporters. It could be one or more people who start a Collaborative. A good leader may possess these qualities:

1. **High potential** – As members develop their skills, it is important to consider their potential. Look for aptitude, desire to grow and overall potential.
2. **Level of engagement** – An individual who proactively makes suggestions for process improvement and shows interest in going beyond their responsibilities may be a future leader.
3. **Accountability** – Members who hold themselves answerable for failure make good leaders.
4. **Multitasking abilities** – If you feel you have identified a leader, try to give them extra responsibilities. Collaborative leaders will have to perform more than one task at a time.
5. **Empathy and emotional intelligence** – A leader will be a good team player, help others and take the time to interact with others.
6. **Communication skills** – Look for a person who has the ability to explain ideas in a clear and concise manner. Someone who has the ability to listen will be a good leader.
7. **Passion for National Service** – We are not talking about a compelling motivation for service. This person is excited by National Service, motivated to support other members, and inspired by the Collaborative model.

Finding Who Shares Your Vision

The best way to find who shares your vision is to spread the word through heavy networking. We looked to state commissioners, local United Ways, philanthropists with a passion for service, community organizers and sponsor organizations. Creating buy-in will take time, but in spreading the word and asking for support, others will help you identify who shares your vision.

State Commission engagement is one of the keys to success. The State Commission is able to support Collaborative events, connect leaders to program staff and current members, and tell new members about the Collaborative as a tool to improve their year.

Finally, cultivating the person leading this effort – the leader – will ultimately define the success of the Collaborative. Though much of the work can be done independently, it cannot be done without the support of others. Finding the person who can provide professional advice, is well-connected to the community, and nurtures the vision and goals of the leader will build a community. This person will have connections and organizational recommendations to help define to success of the organization.

CATALYST TOOLS

Conducting Outreach

Community Conversations

Community conversations are essential to our work. Engaging with members in-person simulates the Collaborative experience and presents the opportunity to cultivate a deeper community connection.

Questions to ask may include:

- What is your best-kept secret to saving money? Favorite resource or grocery spot?
- Why did you decide to serve in AmeriCorps? What keeps you motivated every day?
- What neighborhood do you live in? What has been the best or worst things about living there?
- What challenges have you had serving in your program or at your site?
- What are ways a group like the Collaborative could help you overcome those challenges?

Surveys

Surveys are a great way to collect information from members and champions near and far. Here is an example of one of our membership surveys:

“The Collaborative is a model that leverages the network of service members, alumni, and national service champions working to ensure that every AmeriCorps member's year of service is as fulfilling and impactful as possible. We hope that by distributing this survey to the members of our community, we can learn about the interests, hopes, and dreams of our members.”

Information to collect may include:

- **Contact information** such as name, email, phone
- **Demographic information** such as age, gender identity and association with AmeriCorps
- **Programmatic information** such program, sponsor organization, length and location of service
- **Housing information** such as immediate housing location, area currently living, location they spend most time in
- **Engagement and connection information** such as how they heard of the Collaborative, if they are connected via social media, and ranked questions about involvement interest (wanting to be more connected, learn more about programs, find a job, find housing, learn about resources, training and professional development opportunities, etc)

Social Media

Facebook Groups allow privacy and exclusive posting, making housing searches, furniture giveaways, or asking personal advice a bit easier to do. The leader will want define clear rules about posting and moderate conversations. You may want the privacy level to include permissions, so you can let new group members know what the Collaborative is, what the rules are for posting, and ensure they are an AmeriCorps member. This has been the most effective form of collecting and sharing information about the Collaborative.

CATALYST TOOLS

Funding: Start-Up Grants and Crowdfunding

You may want to consider helping the leader identify or propose a start-up grant. Organizations who may do this are local social justice funds, United Ways, or family foundations. If you are a sponsor organization that has non-discretionary funding, you may want to consider creating a start-up grant opportunity for a Collaborative. Crowdfunding is also a viable option, particularly for a Collaborative. If every AmeriCorps member in your area gave \$1, \$5, \$10, you could have a great pot to start from!

Planning a Kick-Off Event

Who should be there?

- National Service champions and service-minded individuals
- Program staff and state commission leadership
- AmeriCorps Alums chapter leadership and members
- Current AmeriCorps members from all programs in your area

The most effective form of outreach for events is by **personal invitation**.

What should you prepare?

Conversations starters to help facilitate conversation and excitement around National Service:

- Why did you join AmeriCorps? What is your motivation to serve?
- What excites you about a group dedicated to AmeriCorps members?
- What would be the most useful thing that a Collaborative could offer you? How could it enhance your service experience?

Presentation to explain the Collaborative model, describe buy-in, thank your catalyst, collect feedback, and ask for donations, involvement and volunteers.

Follow-up information to let people know their next steps for involvement. Collect names, emails and phone numbers at the event.

When and where should you have it?

Consider the location that is **most central** to the majority of the AmeriCorps members you want to engage. A good location would be easy to get to, relatively quiet, plenty of space.

Are you ready for kick-off?

- You have **clear member interest** as demonstrated through surveys and conversations.
- You have confirmed **leadership commitment** from current AmeriCorps members.
- You have **monetary support**.
- You have support from your **state-level commission**. They have agreed to disseminate information and serve on the Advisory Board.
- You have an individual or organizational **catalyst** that is connected to a greater vision who has agreed to be a key sponsor or partner.