

2009 Kentucky AmeriCorps Launch

The AmeriCorps Launch was a little different this year. The program year kickoff and training event for Kentucky AmeriCorps members was held on Oct. 1-2 in Lexington instead of Frankfort for good reason. Kentucky has additional AmeriCorps members due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and we outgrew our previous venue.

Another change was having the member induction ceremony at the hotel instead of on the steps of the Kentucky State Capitol, but that did not curb the enthusiasm of the more than 300 first- and second-year AmeriCorps members as they took a pledge to get things done in Kentucky. KCCVS Commission Chair Aaron Anderkin led the program directors and members in the pledge.



Members, assigned to one of 13 AmeriCorps state programs serving 115 counties, will help address unmet, local human service needs. About one-third of the members in this year's class are second-year members. CHFS Secretary Janie Miller welcomed the new and returning AmeriCorps members to the program.

"AmeriCorps members truly make a difference, and I am proud of the enthusiasm and zeal these members bring to their service in Kentucky," she said. "Our AmeriCorps programs have grown each year as more Kentuckians choose to contribute to their communities in these difficult economic times when the need is even greater."



The launch began with a bang with an opening plenary featuring Jay McChord, former UK mascot and motivational speaker on leadership and generational communication. Another memorable session was the closing plenary with Hasan Davis, a nationally recognized performer, youth advocate and motivator. Members left the launch energized and ready to serve.

This year's event also featured training sessions on mentoring, digital citizenship, volunteer recruitment and retention, disabilities awareness, working with the media, organizing and making the most of one's service year, disaster preparedness, reporting abuse, personal safety, creativity and teamwork.

"The sessions gave us a time to learn and have fun at the same time," one member commented.

The AmeriCorps members enjoyed networking with members of other programs and learning how AmeriCorps is growing in Kentucky. As a new project this year, members signed their name on a giant map of Kentucky in the county where they are serving – a visual of how they are part of the bigger picture of AmeriCorps in Kentucky, and just how many members there are.



Members ranging in age from 18 to 73 signed on for a year of service to their communities and received training to equip them to fulfill their service assignments. In addition to performing community service tasks, members also recruit local volunteers to help ensure programs and progress continue after members complete their terms of service.

Eileen Cackowski, executive director of the KCCVS, said that Kentucky AmeriCorps members continue to prove the value of community service in meeting even the most serious social, academic and preparedness challenges.

“Faced with challenges, they persevere and overcome, reaching out to their fellow Kentuckians with direct service, compassion and care,” Cackowski said.

“AmeriCorps members help elderly people remain in their homes, learn and train others to respond in the event of emergencies, help at-risk students catch up and even surpass their academic peers and, perhaps most valuable of all, they offer an ear to listen and a strong desire to help that inspires and appeals to others seeking a way to serve.”

The KCCVS would like to thank our training officer, Melissa Newton, for her hard work organizing a great event. We wonder what she will come up with next year!