Birmingham Service Corps
United States
A locally-implemented and federally-funded grassroots response to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis

Summary
Birmingham Corps began in response to the COVID-19 crisis. A central aspect of the program provided participants with paid service learning. Participants worked in roles including: Covid-19 screening, making school lunches to be distributed to children, and supporting testing sites. In 2022, the program expanded and became a part of CityCorps, a national effort supported and led by Baltimore Corps. Birmingham Corps was inspired by the program.

Rationale
COVID-19 crisis response program and the availability of foundation and public funds.

Defining Principles
Provide a safety net through professional development and social impact entrepreneurship. Their core values are: “Advancing equity & racial justice, Elevating & fortifying the social-impact sector,” (1).

Dates of Operation
2021 - present.

Number of Program Participants
300+

Criteria for Participation
High School graduate or GED recipient. 18 years old or older. Hold one of the following citizenship statuses: US citizen, US National, Lawful Permanent Resident Aliens. Pass a National Service Criminal History Check. Ability to serve 40 - 45 hours per week. These are the U.S. Americorps work requirements (2).

Pay and Benefits
Up to $21,000 living allowance over 10 months (1700 hours), paid bi-weekly (3). Benefits: Medical & dental insurance; supplemental nutrition (SNAP)*; child-care stipend*; around 4,500 Segal Education Award for tuition; eligibility for student loan forebearance; 8 hours a week in professional development and career services to onramp you into your next high-quality career opportunity (4). *Subject to eligibility for programs
Financing
U.S. Americorps and a mixture of additional public and philanthropic funds through non-profit entity Birmingham Corps. In 2020, a $1 million investment came from the Birmingham Office of Economic Opportunity and Innovation along with two redeployed economic development incentive programs (5). A key funding source is the existing Americorps Vista program through Americorps Vista Alabama ($576K for the 2022-2023 program, submitted for renewal annually) (6).

Implementation
Year long, full-time public service (“social impact”) employment program (“Capacity Builders”), which is combined with grantmaking and lending to “early-stage social entrepreneurs and Main Street businesses.” Program participants are provided with: race & equity trainings, leadership and professional skills workshops, networking events, community service projects, 40 hours per week of hands-on work experience.

Types of Work
Community services including Covid-19 screening, making school lunches to be distributed to children, supporting testing sites, and community health worker training. coordinating career counseling, pre-employment training and GED classes; coordinating mentoring, counseling, mental health, healthy food access and other wellbeing resources; coordinating child care services, transportation, high-speed internet access, and other safety net provisions critical to holistically supporting families and parents attempting to attach to work; developing programs to increase access to literacy interventions and exposure to STEM opportunities as a pathway to gainful employment (7).

Notable Features
Average age of those who have signed up is 32. Paid community volunteers.

Program Website
https://birminghamcorps.org/
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Citations
(2) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.
(3) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.
(4) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.
(7) Birmingham Corps. CM Info Session: Birmingham Corps Capacity Builders AmeriCorps Program.

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