

Relocation

Relocation Services

Adapted from the Washington Service Corps website. The Washington Reading Corps program is a Washington Service Corps site.

Moving to a new community is always a challenge, and that can be doubly true when you are starting a new position at the same time. Doing some advance work before you arrive can save you a lot of time and stress down the road. Ideally, every member would have the chance to visit their site ahead of time, but realistically, that isn't often the case. To help you get started ahead of time, we have put together some information and links to resources that you may find useful.

Begin Research

- If you already know what your service site will be, get the address from your project supervisor and find it on a map using [Mapquest](#) or [Google Maps](#) (which also has a cool satellite feature that lets you actually see the streets and buildings). With these tools, you can zoom out to see where in your community your site is located and use that information to help you narrow down which areas you would like to live in. **Caution!**-- sometimes objects on these maps are farther than they appear, and other factors, such as traffic and bus transfers, may make the commute much longer than it looks. You can't really get a feel for how long the trip takes until you experience it for yourself! Read more about [Location and Transportation](#) below.
- Look up the [public transportation routes](#) that service your site. We strongly recommend that members walk, bike, or use public transportation!
- Focus in on those neighborhoods that are easily accessible and offer good transportation options to your site.
- Figure out what you can afford in rent (see [Creating a Realistic Budget](#))
- Set up some [Temporary Housing](#) to tide you over for a week.
- Figure out what you want out of your housing by [Assessing Your Housing Needs](#).
- Check out the [Rental Resources](#) page for links to on-line rental agencies, info about low-income housing, and other housing tips.
- Look for AmeriCorps roommates, housing offers, furniture hand-me-downs, etc. on the AmeriCorps Bulletin Board. Click on the "Enter My Forum" button below.

Location/Transportation

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Location

When people apply to AmeriCorps programs in [Washington State](#), they are usually a little overwhelmed by all of the options – Washington State is lucky enough to have over 1600 members serving each year, and the programs are located all over the state. WA Service Corps has around 700 members serving throughout WA, both on teams of 10-60 people and serving individually. Washington Reading Corps has about 300 members statewide; locally, WRC at ESD 112 has about 30 members each year.

One factor that often plays into this decisions is location: Do you want to live somewhere urban or rural? Sunny or rainy? Close to the water? Close to the mountains? In an area with a lot of ethnic diversity? Low cost of living? Public transportation? We've got a little of it all! WRC of SW Washington includes the large-sized city of Vancouver, and several medium-

sized and rural communities to the north of Vancouver (Toutle and Kelso) and to the east of Vancouver (Stevenson, Carson, Klickitat and Wishram).

For more information on some of our communities, please visit the sites listed below:

Columbia River Gorge: <http://www.gorge.net/community/default.asp>

City of Vancouver: <http://www.cityofvancouver.us/Default.asp>

Fort Vancouver Regional Library District: <http://www.cityofvancouver.us/Default.asp>

Cowlitz County Tourism: <http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/tourism/Commtty/toutlevalleyacc.htm>

Klickitat County Home: <http://www.klickitatcounty.org/>

Skamania County Website: <http://www.skamania.org/>

Transportation

One of the philosophies of the AmeriCorps program, especially the AmeriCorps*VISTA program, is to live in the neighborhood or community where you serve. However, sometimes for reasons of price or lack of available housing, members are forced to live away from their sites. While this is sometimes unavoidable, we strongly encourage you to consider proximity to your site (the place where you will be serving most days of the week) as a major factor in your housing selection. For example, it would be unreasonable to live in Vancouver and drive to Toutle every day; you and your community are better served when you live at or near your service site.

Eliminating the time, expense, and stress of long commutes is one of the best things you can do to make your service year more positive. For that reason, transportation options from your site are one of the primary things to consider when choosing housing. Understanding the layout of your community and the way in which different neighborhoods connect is important to do before making a housing commitment.

For reasons both monetary and environmental, we strongly suggest that members walk, bike, or use public transportation. [Click here for a list of all public transportation in Washington \(http://www.apta.com/links/state_local/wa.cfm\)](http://www.apta.com/links/state_local/wa.cfm). Depending on your site, you will want to look at Vancouver (listed under larger transit agencies), and then look at the following counties: Cowlitz, Klickitat and Skamania for our less urban areas; however, in rural sites keep in mind that you will probably need a car.

Budgeting

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Before arranging your housing, you should create a realistic budget for your service year to determine the amount of rent you can afford. Most full-time WRC AmeriCorps USA and VISTA members take home around \$750 - \$850 per month after taxes (this amount varies depending on what you claim on your W-4). Keep in mind that AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps*VISTA members are eligible for food stamps, although the exact amount of the benefit will not be known until you meet with a case manager. Additionally, some programs are able to provide some help with transportation costs (such as bus passes). Make sure to ask your project supervisor about any benefits you may be eligible for, and factor that into your budget calculations.

Relocation Expenses: Estimate the costs of your move to Washington.

Moving Your Belongings - Rental Truck, Shipping, Movers, Etc.

Moving Supplies – Boxes, Suitcases, Etc.

Clothing – Appropriate professional attire for the school

Transportation - Plane or train ticket, gas money, airport shuttles, etc.

Initial rent and deposits - Many landlords require payment of first and last month's rent and a security deposit.

Temporary Housing - You may need a few nights at a hostel, dorm, or hotel while you look at housing--see below for suggestions

Driver's License Registration - See box below for more info.

Cash Reserves - YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE YOUR FIRST CHECK FOR 25 DAYS!!

Washington Reading Corps members who start on the 1st will receive their first check on the 25th. Those starting on the 15th will receive theirs on the 10th of the next month. It takes time to process paperwork through the various agencies, so please be patient!

VISTA Relocation Benefits:

AmeriCorps*VISTA may receive a **relocation allowance** for a move from your home of record to the project site. In addition, VISTAs may receive some reimbursement for transportation costs. Contact the project supervisor (360-750-7500 x338) or the WA Service Corps (1-888-713-6080) for more information.

Special Note on Residency

One consideration for members coming from out of state is whether or not to [gain WA residency](#). Factors to consider include (but are not limited to): taxes (especially if you are listed as a dependent on someone else's return), voting, state university tuition, and vehicle registration.

For those of you who want to become a WA resident or plan to live here for an extended time beyond your year of service, you are required to [get a WA state driver's license](#), (about \$35). If you are planning to become a WA resident and own your own vehicle, you will also need to [register your car in WA](#), which costs around \$37.** Certain urban counties also require emissions testing. AmeriCorps members who do not wish to become WA residents are [not required to do so](#). AmeriCorps can be considered students for these purposes if they plan to only be in WA for one year.

Another factor in residency is voter registration. If you choose to become a WA resident, you should [register to vote in WA](#). If you choose to retain residency in another state, make sure to [register for an absentee ballot](#) so you can vote in your home state.

***If you buy a car in a state within 90 days of moving to WA and did not pay sales tax on it, you can be charged that sales tax when you register your car in WA and get your WA plates. Call your local [Dept of Licensing](#) for more info.*

Monthly Budget

The following monthly budgets are low and high-end samples for living in WA. These are just general outlines to use as templates to estimate your own costs. As you can see, it is possible to survive on the modest AmeriCorps living allowance (although you may have to make some trade-offs)! Keep in mind that budgets may need to be higher or lower depending on whether you live in Vancouver or a rural site such as Wishram. For example, members in rural areas may have to drive longer distances to their service site and pay more for gas, but members in Vancouver may have to pay more for housing.

You should try to estimate your monthly expenses to find the range of monthly rent you think you will be able to afford. Monthly rents vary widely, but in general rents under \$300 are very rare, and few members pay over \$400. Unless you have some form of outside support, anything over \$350 is going to be difficult to manage, although it is doable if your other expenses are minimal. Your project supervisor and current members are good sources of information on monthly costs.

WA Sample AmeriCorps Member Monthly Budget
For Single Person (No Children)

Living Support Item	Low End	High End
Rent	\$300	\$450
Utilities gas, electricity, phone, cable	\$50	\$75
Food not including "entertainment food"	\$0	\$150
	(food stamps)	
Personal Items soap, shampoo, etc.	\$15	\$50
Transportation including parking, gas, insurance	\$0 (no car)	\$150
Laundry	\$15	\$50
Health Care deductibles for prescriptions and Dr. visits	\$10	\$50
Miscellaneous clothing, entertainment, etc.	\$50	\$100
TOTAL	\$440	\$1,075

Policies on Second Jobs

- AmeriCorps USA: WRC prefers that you not burden yourself with a second job that might detract from your service. Talk to your project supervisor.
- VISTA: Members are prohibited by federal law from holding a second job or receiving any monetary compensation other than the living allowance.

Temporary Housing

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If you will not have housing lined up before moving to your new service community, having a place to stay for a week or two can relieve a lot of stress and give you the time you need to find more permanent housing that really meets your needs. The best temporary housing options are friends, family, and other AmeriCorps members serving in your community. Ask your project supervisor about staying with current members and check out websites such as the Housing Connections (<http://www.housingconnections.org/>) for housing options. For housing outside of Vancouver, contact your project supervisor or go to the city/county websites for more information.

In addition, there may be a few low-cost short-term housing options such as [hostels](#). Another good bet is to check with any local colleges in your town--some rent out dorm rooms on a per-night basis for as little as \$15! Some members have also planned to stay in a [state park](#) for a week while looking--a very low-cost option!

Questions to Ask Your Temporary Housing Provider

Whether you will be staying with another member or in a hostel or YMCA, there are some things you should clarify before agreeing to a temporary housing situation, especially if it will be for a week or more.

- Proximity to your project site.
- Accessibility to public transportation
- Secure places to leave your belongings? Is there a charge?
- Is there a curfew?
- Do you allow co-ed rooms (if applicable)?
- What is the cancellation policy?
- Do you offer discounts for weekly or monthly rates?
- What is the maximum nights allowed in one stay? What type of identification do you require at check-in?

Assess Housing Needs

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Before you arrive in your new community, it's a good idea to have some idea of what housing characteristics will make you most comfortable and content in your living situation. The

following table offers one format to do so. Rank your priority preferences "high" or "low" in the space provided, then identify the top four priority items that you simply cannot live without.

Remember, your housing options may be limited, so you might not be able to find a place that perfectly fits your desires. These items will help focus your housing search on the bare minimums, which you will try not to compromise.

Housing Characteristics	Not a Preference	Low Priority	High Priority
Live alone			
Share with a roommate(s)			
Access to public transportation			
Private bedroom			
Roommates with common interests			
Pet friendly			
Modern conveniences and appliances (e.g dishwasher, elevator)			
Space w/ character (hardwood floors, claw foot tub)			
Room(s) filled with sunlight			
Comfortable space to spend my free time relaxing, reading, watching TV			
A place to just crash at night-- I spend most of my time at work and out			
Access to an outdoor space like balcony or garden			
Shortest commute possible*			
A quiet, tranquil neighborhood			
Neighborhood buzzing w/ people and lots of things to see and do			
Diverse, multicultural neighbors			
Walking distance to a park			
Walking distance to restaurants, shops, nightlife			
Other			

Long Distance Apartment Hunting

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Now that you have an idea of:

- the town or neighborhood where you want to live,
- how much you can afford to pay, and
- your preferred housing characteristics,

you are ready to begin doing some long distance apartment hunting. Tips and Information on long-distance apartment hunting, including an overview of low-income housing and search strategies, can be found in [Rental Resources](#).

Don't Forget to Bring...

Remember to bring with you these important enrollment documents: a copy of a [certified birth certificate](#) or [passport](#) (there is usually a charge of between \$5-30 for the birth certificate, \$70-100 for a passport), a copy of [social security card](#), and a picture ID if you don't have a passport.

After you have begun to do a little research on where you want to live and what kind of budget you are working with (see [Before you Arrive](#)), you can start working out the details and actually searching for housing. This page offers information for AmeriCorps members that will help with the housing search as well as the moving-in process. It includes:

- [Permanent Housing Options](#) – various types of living arrangements
- [Housing Search Strategies](#) – ideas and links for your housing search, including on-line apartment search links

- Getting a Discount
- [Standard Lease Requirements](#)
- [Moving In](#)
- [Tenants' Rights](#)

Permanent Housing Options

The majority of AmeriCorps members live in apartments, and almost all of them have roommates. Very few live alone, so be prepared to share a space with at least one other person. If you feel uncomfortable about having a roommate, you will probably need to look at your budget choices, especially if you are living in one of the more expensive urban areas.

We encourage our members to try and keep rent at around \$300-\$350 per month. In some areas (like Vancouver) that can be difficult, while in other locations you might find several options within that price range. If you are in an urban area, you may discover some cheaper living options farther out, but you will need to consider the extra costs (in both time and money) of a lengthy commute.

Apartment/Room Shares: By far the most common way for AmeriCorps members to find affordable housing is through apartment share arrangements. In a share, a tenant of an apartment or home advertises for a roommate. In most cases, the housing will offer a private bedroom and shared common areas (kitchen, bathroom and perhaps living room). When exploring shared arrangements, take time to interview and scrutinize your potential roommate. Look for renters with similar lifestyles as yourself, such as smoker vs. non-smoker, cat-lover vs. allergy-sufferer. Analyze your gut feelings about this arrangement.

AmeriCorps Group Shares: Another way to make housing more affordable is to get together with other AmeriCorps members in your area and search together for a house or apartment with multiple bedrooms. A 3-bedroom apartment with rent split into thirds will almost always be cheaper than a 1-bedroom (or even a studio) for a single person.

Make sure that you lay down ground rules about shared duties and expectations with a [roommate agreement](#). Many roommate conflicts can be avoided by openly discussing and agreeing to these things ahead of time. If you are already experiencing problems, contact a [dispute resolution center](#) in your area for free mediation and resources.

Living Alone: It is rare to find a studio or 1-bedroom apartment that would be affordable on the AmeriCorps stipend. If you have your heart set on one, look for ones with income restrictions-- they might be cheaper. Another option might be a mother-in-law (or MIL), which is an apartment within a house. MILs have their own kitchen and bathroom facilities, but you might share the yard and/or laundry facilities with the rest of the house. Finally, some buildings rent out Single Room Occupancy (SRO) apartments, which are often in converted hotels. In SRO's you have your own bedroom but usually share kitchen and bathroom spaces with other tenants. They can be significantly cheaper than studio apartments.

Housing Search Strategy

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Finding housing on an AmeriCorps budget can be tough, but you can do it! Here are some strategies to pursue that might be helpful in your housing search:

1) Networking - Through word-of-mouth, contact all relatives, friends, school associates, etc. who live (or know someone who lives) where you will be serving. About 45% of AmeriCorps and VISTA members surveyed in Seattle found their housing through a friend, family member, or other AmeriCorps member. Ask everyone if they know of any available housing, and ask them to spread the word about what you are looking for. Reconnect with your contacts periodically to check on any new leads.

2) *Classifieds Search* (on-line and upon arrival) – Search and respond to on-line and printed classified ads that meet your criteria. Please note that communities vary greatly in the degree to which they pursue online housing ads. For some of our sites, these internet listings will have many offerings, but for others, especially in rural areas, they may have none. That does not mean that there aren't plenty of great housing opportunities in those communities, but you will need to rely more heavily on the word-of-mouth and neighborhood search strategies. If you are moving to a rural area and can't find information on-line about a place you are looking at, feel free to ask them to send you pictures so you can get a better idea of the property.

[Craigslist](#) – With thousands of listings, capability to search by neighborhood and price, and many housing share offerings, Craig's List is one of the most useful housing search tools around. Unfortunately, does not serve all communities.

You can also run on-line searches for property management companies in your community and Google "relocation (your town name) Washington" to get links to lots of real estate and other information

- Housing Connections: Vancouver/Portland: www.housingconnections.org
- Columbia River Gorge: www.gorge.net
- Rent.com
- Forrent.com
- Apartments.com
- National sites. Seem to contain mostly apartment complexes.
- Roommates.com - Post an ad for a roommate or scan the roommate offerings.

College Housing Boards – If there is a college in your community, check on their website for an off-campus housing bulletin and for other on-line housing tips they might offer.

- Vancouver: WSU-Vancouver: <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/>
- Vancouver: Clark College: <http://www.clark.edu/>
- Cowlitz County: Lower Columbia: <http://lowercolumbia.edu/>
- East of Vancouver: Columbia Gorge Community College: www.cgcc.cc.or.us/

Community Newspapers – Many communities, large and small, have begun to put out on-line newspapers. Bigger cities may have multiple papers, including alternative and niche papers. Run an internet search on the community newspapers for your service site. These may or may not contain classified ads, but they will give you a feel for the community before you arrive.

- The Columbian (Vancouver): <http://www.columbian.com/>
- The Daily News (Longview): <http://www.tdn.com/>
- White Salmon Enterprise: <http://www.whitesalmonenterprise.com/>
- Mt. St. Helens Valley Bugler: <http://www.valleybugler.com/>
- The Dalles Chronicle (OR): <http://www.thedalleschronicle.com/>
- The Oregonian (OR): <http://www.oregonlive.com/oregonian/>

Free Weekly or Neighborhood Papers – Some communities have free weekly or neighborhood papers available in corner stands and local stores. They can often be an excellent source of listings.

What do Former Tenants Have to Say?

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Check out this [apartment rating site](#) to read what current and former tenants have to say about different apartment buildings. The site includes a forum for tenants to rate and comment on the building as well as other information like average unit rental price. Site has buildings all over the state, some with more ratings than others - highly entertaining and informative.

3) *Neighborhood Search* – Visit affordable neighborhoods that interest you. Walk the residential streets and look for "FOR RENT" signs. Check community boards at universities, co-ops, libraries, and service agencies for available housing information.

Make sure when you are comparing listings that you are comparing apples to apples. Do they include water/sewer/garbage? That can cost at least \$60 per month. Are utilities paid? Those will be an additional \$50 at least, unless you have a small space or are very efficient. Remember, a place that seems like a real steal but doesn't include any of these things may end up costing you more than another place with higher rent but utilities included. If these things are not included, make sure to ask what they usually run so you don't find yourself with unexpectedly high bills.

Getting a Discount

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[Low Income Apartment Finder](#): Gives a lot of information about the properties and allows you to search by area as well as by your circumstances (family, elderly, etc.)

[Subsidized Housing Locator](#): Ignore the ads at the top! Scroll down for subsidized apartments or run a search by community in the upper right hand corner.

Look for apartments that advertise themselves as low-income or subsidized. Take the "Excludable Income" documents with you and an AmeriCorps pay stub.

While your AmeriCorps living stipend might make it tough to find housing in your price range, the fact that you are an AmeriCorps member can have its advantages in the world of rental housing. Some landlords will be impressed by what you are doing, and others will take it as a sign that you will be good tenants (and the regularity of your paychecks doesn't hurt either!). Many members have gotten reduced rent over the years simply by explaining AmeriCorps and asking for a lower rent.

Download this [letter](#) (WRC_rentletter) to help explain to your landlord what AmeriCorps is and encourage them to make you a deal. They might also want something proving that you are an AmeriCorps volunteers (such as a pay stub or contract). Your project supervisor might also have pamphlets or other information you could take along as well, and you can look for additional materials on the [AmeriCorps](#) or [Washington Service Corps](#) websites. Not only are you getting the word out about AmeriCorps, you might get rewarded for it!

Standard Lease Requirements

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Documentation and monetary requirements to sign a lease will vary somewhat depending on whether you are dealing directly with the property owner, or working through a property management firm. Documentation requirements may include:

Employment Letter (stating position, salary and start date)—*These are available from your project supervisor.*

- Recent paystubs
- Bank statements
- Last Year's W-2
- Photo Identification
- References
- Credit check

Some places require that your monthly income be at least three times the rent. If you do not meet minimum income requirements, you may be asked to identify a guarantor for the lease. A guarantor is an individual, such as a parent, who earns an annual income several times the

monthly rent. In most cases, the guarantor will be asked to produce documentation similar to the tenant requirements as described above. Some property managers will not accept personal checks for the first month's rent, security deposit, and to secure the apartment. Therefore, it is important to have access to cash or a cashier's/certified check or money order (which can be obtained through your bank or at places like Western Union.)

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Furnishing a new apartment can be an expensive proposition. Here are a couple of suggestions on where to get furniture on the cheap:

Freecycle

Site for people to give away items for FREE. You sign up for a yahoo group, and you receive and can send e-mails of items wanted and items offered. Many communities have one of these, and items posted often include furniture and appliances.

2good2toss

Operates in many communities throughout Washington. Has "wanted" and "offered" sections, and everything must be under \$100. Lots of great deals on furniture, appliances, all kinds of moving in things.

Thrift Stores

Salvation Army, Goodwill, etc. can be great places to pick up furnishings, appliances, and dishes. There is one of the biggest and best Goodwill's in the state within walking distance of the ESD!

Yard/Garage Sales

Sometimes there are deals to be had at these things, especially at the end of the day.

College Surplus

Sometimes colleges have to get rid of a bunch of furnishings and offer them at a very reasonable price. Contact your local college.

Flexcar

An organization that offers alternatives to owning your own car, sort of like a rental car service. They have trucks as well as cars that could be great for moving. Much more info on their website. When signing up on the website, enter in the AmeriCorps promo code "V25ACorps" for a \$25 usage credit. Currently only in Portland (about 20 minutes from Vancouver) and Seattle (3 hours north of Vancouver).

Tenants Rights ([Back to Top](#))

While, for the most part, most people have a good rental experience, it doesn't hurt to know your rights as a tenant and what recourse you have [should something go wrong](#). The Attorney General's office has put out some very clear instructions on [tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities](#). Click [here](#) to link to the actual text in WA State law.

For disputes involving landlords, consider [mediation](#) as a possible first step. The [WA Tenants' Union](#) also has good information and support for rental disputes as well as a 24-hour hotline.

*Corporation for National and Community Service and WA Service Corps Disclaimer
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