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GMFTS AMERICORPS FAQs WHEN YOU ARE CONSIDERING APPLYING TO BE AN AMERICORPS MEMBER AT GMFTS

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What is unique about being an AmeriCorps member at GMFTS?

GMFTS is a wonderful place to be an AmeriCorps member (AC). Here are some of the reasons why:

- **History** – Our program has been running successfully since 2008, which means we have a good sense of what you need to be successful and have a great year. Our training program, support systems, schedule, and approach have all been refined over the years based on feedback from previous ACs.
- **Hands-on experience** – At GMFTS, you will have direct responsibility for implementing our Farm-to-School program. That means you get direct experience at schools, in gardens, and working with kids, teachers and parents. Although there is also an office component to the position, this is primarily a hands-on job!
- **Affordable** – Although the AmeriCorps stipend is not huge, it goes further in the Northeast Kingdom than almost anywhere else. We offer heavily discounted housing costs, and food and recreation are inexpensive in Newport.
- **Friends** – You will be part of a team of six ACs, all of whom are at similar points in their careers and share many of your interests in education, food, and agriculture. You will have the opportunity to live with, work with, and learn from this team, as well as to make new friends in the process.
- **Independence** – After years of running this program, we have developed the necessary program structure and materials to allow you to work autonomously, to control your own schedule, and have ownership over your school relationships. It's a great combination of support and freedom.
- **Entrepreneurship** – Because we are a rapidly growing nonprofit, you may have the opportunity to create new pieces of the program from scratch, whether that is writing a new lesson plan or building a clay oven for a school! Although you'll need to be responsive to the school's needs and respectful of our time and resource limitations, there is still of room to take initiative and be creative.

Who is this opportunity right for?

We are eager to welcome anybody who thinks that GMFTS, the AC role, and the Northeast Kingdom are right for them! Particularly, we've found that this opportunity is a great fit for people who:

- Are seeking a challenge and are willing to give their all to their job
- Want a hands-on, professional, autonomous, intensive experience
- Like being around and working with people
- Are highly organized (while also allowing a little room for flexibility!)
- Are interested in kids, schools, food, agriculture, farms, communities, or the outdoors
- Comfortable with a long, cold winter climate
- Open minded and willing to meet people where they are
- Passionate about making a difference in limited resource communities

What is the culture of GMFTS?

GMFTS is a rapidly growing nonprofit. Due to the nature of our work and the size of our organization, we are fast paced and have high expectations of our staff. In return, we provide a lot of training and support, as well as the opportunity to wear many hats and have hands-on ownership of the program. By the end of your year with us you will be confidently able to teach a class, manage taste tests, coordinate school-based programs, plant and manage a garden, measure the impact of your work, and much more!

We have hosted a team of ACs since 2008, which means we have a well-organized and established program. ACs play a leadership role in developing and delivering programs at area schools. As a member of the GMFTS team, ACs work closely with other staff doing similar work at other schools. GMFTS supervisors play an active role in ensuring that staff has the resources and support they need to be successful in their role.

At the same time, since our organization is still growing, you will have the opportunity to help us pilot new ideas, develop best practices, and get insider experience in how a nonprofit really works. We rely on ACs to be flexible and creative in your approach to the program.

What types of tasks will I be doing?

Check out the AmeriCorps Coordinator job description for a full description of your tasks.

What does the schedule of the year look like?

GMFTS is an action-packed, fast-paced place to work. ACs are assigned typically 3-5 schools to work in for the school year. Over the course of the year ACs work on a wide variety of tasks that change by the day, the week, and the season.

In general:

The fall (~September to October) tends to be quite busy

- Your focus will be on field work, particularly harvest celebrations
- During these months you will spend more of your time at schools and in gardens, with less of your time in the office

The winter (~November to March) tends to be a bit quieter

- Your focus will be more on program planning, documenting, and other office-based work
- During these months, time spent at schools will be indoors

The spring (~April to May) tends to be busy

- Your focus will again be on field work, including planting and gardening
- During these months you will spend more of your time at schools, and less of your time in the office

The summer (~June to July) tends to be quieter

- There is limited programming, and the main bulk of work will be maintaining school gardens and wrapping up your AmeriCorps term
- During these months you will spend a lot of time outdoors in the garden and doing some educational programming related to summer meals and summer programs

There are very occasional evening and weekend events throughout the year.

At GMFTS you will have the opportunity to manage your own schedule. We trust you to get your work done, and give you the responsibility of figuring out how to manage your tasks each week, including how to balance school workshops and events with completing your office tasks. Of course, your supervisor is available to help you plan and manage any challenges you face. We encourage AmeriCorps members to plan any vacations at the same time as school holidays, since your schedule will be lighter when school is not in session.

What is the culture of the schools where I'll be working?

The schools we work with are small, with about 75-300 kids spread across grades K-6 or K-8. Although the school culture and demographics vary by town and school, all of the schools have a very low student-teacher ratio (some even combine grades into a single class) and are intimate communities. Because they are small, it is easy to get to know the principals and teachers and you will certainly become a known (and loved) team member when you show up at your partner schools.

There are few other programs or partners working consistently with these schools, meaning that GMFTS is a particularly special opportunity for the kids.

Many of the communities in which we work have a strong connection to the land through farming or recreation. At the same time, they struggle with poverty, obesity, and food access. The Northeast Kingdom is ironically both an agricultural area and a certified food desert, meaning that affordable and nutritious food is difficult to obtain. As a result, students may be new to many of the concepts you teach them.

What is the area outside of Newport like?

What we love about living in the Northeast Kingdom is the beautiful landscape, the great farms and food, and the close-knit community. The area is great for outdoor adventures including mountain biking, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, kayaking, and ice skating. There are also cultural activities like live music and art, which you can find locally or in the bigger nearby cities of Burlington, Montpelier, and Montreal. Overall there are lots of things to do and people to meet, but because this is a less dense, rural area you may have to be more proactive in seeking them out and willing to drive a little - activities are usually 30 minutes to an hour away.

Newport itself is a small urban center with about 5,000 people. It is located on Lake Memphremagog and has a Main Street with stores and a few restaurants. Our office is located on Main Street above a natural food store and café.

We do get a lot of snow, and in the thick of winter the temperatures can drop to -30. Not only is the winter colder and snowier than more southern states, but also it lasts longer, usually from November to March. Sometimes we even get snow in April! Therefore, it's important to have an appropriate vehicle and clothing so that you can get out and enjoy the winter here. It also means that we make the most of the summer!

What do I need to know about driving in the Northeast Kingdom?

Since we live in a rural area, you will need to have a reliable car or truck. You will be driving to all of your schools. As a rough estimate, you may drive about 100 miles per week. Luckily, the Northeast Kingdom is one of the most beautiful places in the world, so all the driving is not too bad!

Your car may get a bit dirty in this job. You will be loading garden equipment such as hay bales, shovels, etc. in your car. We recommend getting some tarps to help keep your car clean. In addition, be prepared that there is an extra season in Vermont called “Mud Season.” When the snow melts and the roads thaw, the dirt roads become mud roads that can be challenging to drive on. It usually lasts a few weeks and road crews are fairly good at grading them once they are dry enough. Finally, for your safety we recommend getting snow tires, though winter driving is rarely a problem since the roads in the area are well plowed and schools close if there is significant snowfall.

We reimburse driving at a rate of \$0.51/mile.

How are AmeriCorps members compensated?

ACs receive five types of compensation from AmeriCorps during your term of service:

- Living allowance, paid biweekly
- Loan forbearance during your term of service
- Health insurance

More details about health insurance are available at Summit America Insurance:
https://enrollment.summitamerica-ins.com/school_insurance.aspx?AFID=4&S-CID=37&THID=TCN

- Child care, if necessary
- An education award of \geq \$5,550 (exact amount changes yearly and will be provided)
More details about the education award are available at edaward.org
To earn an education award, you must satisfactorily complete your program requirements and your full term of service (at least 1,700 hours during a nine- to twelve-month period for the full-time award). You can use your education award in the following ways, or a combination of them:
 - Repay qualified existing or future student loans
 - Pay all or part of the current cost of attending a qualified institution of higher education (including certain vocational programs)
 - Pay current expenses while participating in an approved school-to-work program

Additional benefits:

- Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits
- Subsidized housing
- Mileage reimbursement for work-related travel

What have past GMFTS AmeriCorps members enjoyed most/gotten the most from?

ACs have gained so much professionally:

- Hands-on experience at schools and in the gardens
- Direct classroom teaching experience
- Confidence in building relationships with stakeholders from principals to teachers to parents to farmers
- Getting to know a school and town community
- Practice working independently and managing your own work
- Exposure to groundbreaking food systems work in Vermont
- Variety of professional development opportunities

As well as personally:

- A new community of like-minded peers that you live and work with
- Constant support from your class of AmeriCorps members
- Mentoring and guidance from supervisor and staff
- A clearer sense of your own skills, interests, and career goals
- Confidence in your abilities after thriving under significant responsibility

How do I apply?

If you are interested in applying for any of our AmeriCorps positions, please follow the directions on our website, www.greenmountainfarmtoschool.org. Click on the “Join Us” tab, then “Employment.”