

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Breakthrough/AmeriCorps Education Awards

Q: Who is eligible to receive an Education Award?

A: US citizens, US nationals or lawful permanent resident aliens of the US who have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, and are at least 17 years of age. If you do not have a high school diploma, you must pledge to obtain one before accessing the AmeriCorps Education Award.

Q: How much is the Education Award?

A: Teaching at a Breakthrough site this summer qualifies you for a minimum award, or \$1,000, for 300 hours of service.

Q: What do you have to do as an AmeriCorps member?

A: Your job responsibilities are that of a Breakthrough teacher but in addition, AmeriCorps members will be required to plan and execute high school counseling activities during the summer session. This may include organizing special events such as college or career day. Specifics will be determined with your site director. Otherwise, you will have the standard teaching load and Breakthrough teacher responsibilities.

In addition, AmeriCorps members must refrain from engaging in any prohibited activities during the work hours of the summer session. A complete list of prohibited activities is included in the member contract, but include any activity attempting to influence legislation or election or to aid a partisan political organization; engaging in religious instruction; organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes; providing a direct benefit to a for-profit entity, a labor union, a partisan political organization, a religious organization, or a non-profit that engages in lobbying). **This includes taking a vocal stance on any political issue in the classroom.**

Q: How can an Education Award be used?

A: An Education Award can be used to repay qualified existing or future student loans; to pay all or part of the current cost of attending a qualified institution of higher education (including certain vocational programs); or to pay current expenses while participating in an approved school-to-work program.

Q: Will accepting an AmeriCorps award interfere with my financial aid package?

A: It may. You will be taxed on the Education Award in the year you use it which could affect your financial aid package. However, bear in mind that the Education Award can be saved for up to seven (7) years, and can be applied to student loans. In the past, teachers have often deferred using the Award while in college, and have instead applied it to loans or used it for graduate school. You should discuss your particular circumstances with your college or university financial aid office.

Q: What loans accept AmeriCorps vouchers?

A: Most post-secondary loans that are backed by the federal government are qualified for repayment with an AmeriCorps education award. Qualified loans include Stafford Loans,

Perkins Loans, William D. Ford Direct Loans, Federal Consolidated Loans, Supplemental Loans for Students. Your lender should be able to tell you if your loan is qualified.

Q: Is the Education Award Taxable?

A: Yes. You will be taxed on your education award in the year you use it. For example, if you use all or part of your award for college in the Spring of 2008, when you file your 2008 taxes, you must pay taxes on the portion of the award you used. However, you may be able to take advantage of the Hope Scholarship Credit or the Lifelong Learning Credit. Those credits may provide you with significant tax relief. Both the Department of Education and the IRS have information on these tax provisions. The Corporation for National and Community Service does not deduct taxes from the award, but in late January it sends 1099 Forms to all AmeriCorps members who have made payments from their education awards and who have accrued interest during the previous year. The 1099 Form does not need to be included in your tax return, but it reflects the amount that the National Service Trust reports to the IRS as taxable miscellaneous income. If you have questions about how to file taxes for your award, contact your local IRS office.

Q: What paperwork is required?

A: At a minimum, you will need to complete a member contract, enrollment form, W2 and W4 during orientation week, keep time and attendance sheets during the summer, and complete a end-of-term-of-service form and end-of-term evaluation during wrap-up week. A few additional forms may be necessary. Your director should have all relevant forms by orientation week.

Participants who are under 18 years of age will also need to obtain parental permission.

Q: Once I complete my service, how do I get my voucher?

A: At the end of your term of service, once you fill out your exit form and submit all forms to your site director, your site director then needs to send all member documents to the national office. Once the national office staff enters all member information into the AmeriCorps database, the National Service Trust downloads your information. Once the Trust downloads your information, you are now eligible to receive your award. Within 6-8 weeks of receiving your information, the Trust will mail you an award packet with a Voucher and Payment Request Form and instructions. It will also include documentation of the exact amount of the award you will be receiving.

Present the voucher to the school you plan to attend (to cover the costs of attending) or to your loan holder (to pay back an existing loan). The school or loan holder will complete a portion of the voucher and send it to the Trust for payment. The Trust will make payments directly to the institution when you specifically authorize them on the voucher form. Every time a payment is made, you will be sent a new Voucher and Payment Request Form and a statement of the new balance of your trust fund.

Q: How many Education Awards can I get from AmeriCorps?

A: An individual can receive up to two (2) Education Awards from AmeriCorps, regardless of the amount of the award. The award that you are eligible to receive through your service with Breakthrough is a minimum award. If you are planning to participate in Teach for America,

VISTA, City Year, or another full-year service program, you may want to decline this award so that you can accept full-time awards (1700 hours of service or \$4,725) in the future.

Q: Who can I call if I have additional questions?

A: Please call the AmeriCorps Education Award Help Desk at 888-507-5962, Operators now on duty 8am - 6pm EST. Also, you can visit the AmeriCorps Members Handbook at http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/faq/index.asp

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ED AWARD RECIPIENTS

To view the list of institutions that match the Ed Award, please go to:

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/ed_award_match.asp