



Mission-driven and Investing for Impact: An AFC Success Story

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In May, the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS) announced it would not continue to fund [AIDS United](#), and subsequently the [AIDS Funding Collaborative](#) (AFC), to operate its unique and longstanding [AmeriCorps](#) program for the 2016–2017 service year. As we manage the final details of closing out the program nationally, we have learned that through disappointment comes reflection.

As anyone in the nonprofit field will tell you, mission-driven work is challenging. Rarely are nonprofit organizations, philanthropy included, able to embody their entire mission with one program or investment, and the AFC is no exception. The AFC’s mission is to **strengthen the community’s response to HIV/AIDS as a public/private partnership by providing coordination, leadership, advocacy, and funding**. It’s an ambitious mission, to the say the least, and over the last three years the AFC accomplished it with one investment, one program: [AIDS United AmeriCorps](#). For more than 20 years, AIDS United has partnered with the CNCS to operate the largest national AmeriCorps program singularly focused on ending the HIV epidemic through public service and building the next generation of public health leaders.

Beginning in 2012, the AFC partnered with AIDS United to leverage a third of its annual grantmaking dollars to invest in and coordinate this unique national service program in Cleveland. Seen as “living grants,” AmeriCorps service members were awarded to community-based “host agencies” in order to fill gaps and build capacity where traditional resources were limited. Each year, a new cohort of AmeriCorps service members were trained and placed at agencies for 11 months to serve full time, tackling our toughest challenges in HIV prevention and care.

Unbound by restricted grant dollars, benchmarks, and reporting requirements, agencies found a new flexibility through the service members. With the infusion of new, fresh frontline staff, the impact of being able to think creatively and adapt quickly gave the Cleveland HIV community a renewed energy and motivation. The natural synergy among the service team inspired deeper

and more meaningful collaboration among agencies; programs flourished with having dedicated staff; community planning groups and agencies relied on the leadership of the service teams for being go-to experts on emerging and innovative HIV prevention and care strategies, and as the extra hands needed to implement community-level outreach and awareness initiatives. These energetic and passionate individuals used their talents and training to conduct HIV testing and counsel individuals about risk reduction strategies such as [Pre Exposure Prophylaxis](#) (PrEP), assist people living with HIV/AIDS in accessing life-saving treatment and supportive services, and much more.

Over the course of three program years, the AFC increased its investment from five to eight service members. The service teams collectively reached over 23,000 individuals with HIV prevention messages including [referrals for PrEP](#), conducted HIV testing and risk reduction counseling with 3,256 individuals, provided emotional and social supportive services to over 900 people living with HIV, and assisted hundreds of people living with HIV who were previously un- or underinsured in enrolling in Ohio's expanded Medicaid and private health insurance programs. At the conclusion of each service year, at least one service member was hired by a host agency and/or within the HIV service community. In the most recent service year, three service members were hired by host agencies – a record for the national program.

Contemplating the success of the program, the AFC is hopeful that, with a new administration, CNCS will reinstate funding to AIDS United, allowing the AFC and many other national partners the opportunity to build on the program's 20+ successful years of working toward an end to HIV while growing the public health workforce.



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