

Where does Cooking Matters fit in with Share Our Strength?

Share Our Strength is a national non-profit organization working to end hunger and poverty. The organization has two campaigns—Cooking Matters and No Kid Hungry. While the work within the organization is complementary, this AmeriCorps position is part of the Cooking Matters campaign and focuses on teaching parents and caregivers with limited food budgets to shop for and cook healthy meals.

How has Cooking Matters adapted this position as well as its programs and operations to respond to COVID-19?

The coronavirus has greatly affected work norms for the AmeriCorps position and for Cooking Matters as a whole. Currently, Cooking Matters Massachusetts delivers all programming online and both staff and AmeriCorps members work remotely from home. However, we are looking for candidates who can both meet the demands of working remotely to deliver online programming AND the responsibilities and tasks associated with in-person programming in the event we can resume it. For in-person programs, this would include being vaccinated for COVID-19 to protect your own safety as well as that of the partners and families with whom we work. This FAQ attempts to answer questions related to both the current circumstances and the possible future requirements of this position.

It says in the job description that I will have regular travel throughout the state, but do I REALLY need a car?

Yes! Although we are currently hosting all programs online and not using cars at all, as soon as we begin in-person programming again **you must be in the Greater Boston area and ready to drive to programs**. A driver's license and reliable car is required since you will be assigned to lead programs throughout the state and must transport a lot of supplies. When running in-person programs, travel varies month-to-month, but it is normal to drive 250-750 miles per month. You will be reimbursed at the federal travel reimbursement rate for programs that you travel to.

Why does the job description say that I need to “be able to lift 40 pounds”?

Cooking Matters staff will need to load and unload all the supplies for in-person programming, which makes this job very physical. A typical class needs about 300 pounds of supplies: groceries for 12+ people, bins of supplies on carts, portable cooking equipment, incentives, props and visual aids. Here is an example of what a coordinator's car looks like.



The job description says I'll work in various community organization settings. What does this mean? There's also no mention of working with kids. Will I have the chance to teach kids?

Cooking Matters works primarily with organizations that are serving parents and caregivers of young children: Head Start programs, family shelters, teen parent programs, family resource centers, child care provider programs, etc. The focus of programming is working with an adult population—parents and caregivers of kids age 0-5. For our online programming we are currently working on ways to engage and involve children, as we are reaching participants directly in their homes where childcare is not available and many children are home more than usual during the pandemic. For in-person programs, Cooking Matters does offer one curricula that includes children. Also, depending on the childcare available at a site, there may or may not be children present during programs. In those cases, we may share some related kids' activity sheets and have a site staff person engage the kids while we lead the program for parents.

How many hours will I work each week? Do I really have to work evenings/weekends? Do I get vacation or sick time?

Members are required to complete a minimum of 1700 hours of service during a 12-month period, averaging to 35 hours per week. You are allowed 15 sick and/or vacation days. In addition, our office is closed for all federal holidays, the week between Christmas and New Year’s, and Fridays off every couple of weeks for additional respite with COVID. Days off do not count toward the 1700 hour service requirement. This is not a typical 9—5 position; your work hours vary day-to-day and week-to-week. In order to accommodate the schedules of the families we are trying to serve, we schedule programs between 9am-8pm and sometimes on weekends. Your work hours will change depending on the scheduled time of the programs assigned to you. There is a chance you will be working up to 2 evenings and/or one weekend day per week to run classes. When programming runs after typical work hours, you are not expected to work more than 8 hours. For example, if you have a program that ends at 8:00pm, you would not typically be expected to start your work day before noon. While some flexibility is necessary, we do our best to accommodate circumstances that might limit an AmeriCorps member’s availability.

How has COVID and working from home changed any of this?

COVID has had a big impact on the daily work schedule, both in type of work and timing. While working from home, expect to spend your day on the computer, making frequent use of Outlook and Zoom to communicate with other team members. A laptop is provided as well as a phone/internet stipend. A good internet connection will be necessary! There is a lot of video time both interacting with participants online and getting to see co-workers’ faces in meetings. The hours are also more self-paced (ex. One person might work 9-5, while another works 8-12, break, then 2-6). We understand that working from home means there are responsibilities present (pets, kids, etc.) that are not there in an office environment. With so much screen time, we want people to feel free to take a stretch break/walk/rest your eyes. It is still very important to have a flexible schedule to accommodate online programs scheduled in the evenings and for the eventual shift back into in-person programming.

Is there anything else I need to know about the work schedule?

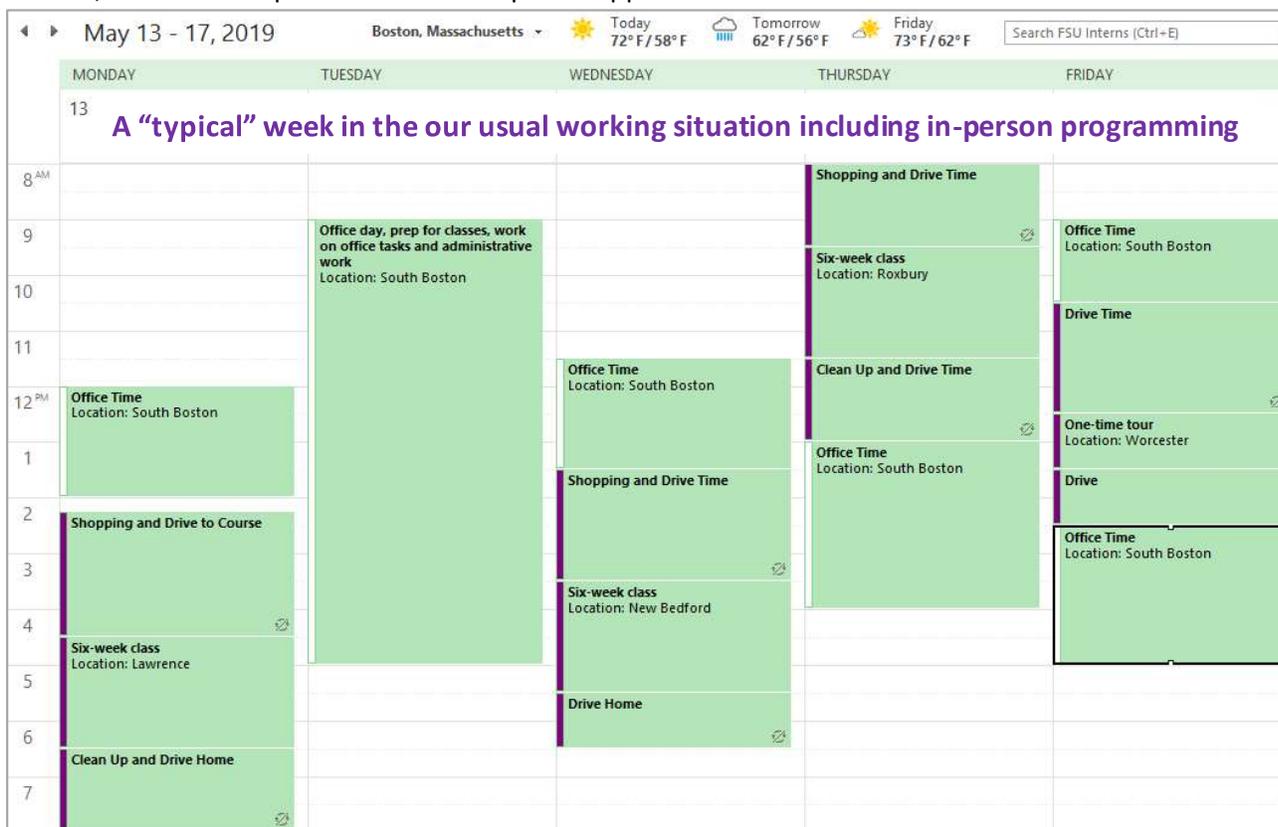
Yes! Here are two sample calendars to help you get a sense of what a “typical” week might look like.

A “typical” week in the current remote working situation

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8 AM	12	--	--	--	--
9	Administrative Tasks: Working on projects and assignments; prepping for programming	Admin		Admin	Admin
10	Meeting agenda time; https://stren Admin	Check-in meeting ; https://stren	Cooking Matters Online Series		
11		Team Meeting https://strength.zoom.us/j/92732843 Palladino, Veronica	Program DEI Committee Meeting https://strength.zoom.us/j/96397437 Adeola, Faith		Mapping project check-in; http://
12 PM	Parent/ Child Pilot- Finalize temp https://strength.zoom.us/j/95185618 Rees, Elena	Admin	Meeting Free Half Day Sanders, Tracee	Admin	Admin
1	Admin	AmeriCorps Monthly Call		Food Justice is Racial Justice: National Farm to School Network https://us2web .	
2	Request for Feedback: Food Cultu https://strength.zoom.us/j/91332509 Hickey, Shannon	Admin		Cooking Matters Facebook Live Spanish Cooking Matters Facet	
3	Admin	Updated - CM Team bi-weekly series https://strength.zoom.us/j/91738765 Edwards Hall, Leigh Ann		Admin	
4		Check-in about Tomorrow's Progi Admin		October Progra https://strength2 Adeola, Faith	Cooking Matte Dan lead, Gina te Cooking Matt
5				Cooking Matters Online Series wil Neftali Lead Spanish, Shannon Lead I Cooking Matters MA	
6			CM@Home Series: Horizons for H https://strength.zoom.us/j/93382280 Palladino, Veronica		

During the COVID remote-work period, the working hours are more traditional, but still with one evening for programming. Without driving and shopping, hours spent on programming are more limited, so this schedule is color-

coded to give you a better sense of how your time may be spent. Light blue indicates “free” time spent on independent projects, dark blue is for Cooking Matters administrative meetings, red is for online programs, purple for AmeriCorps responsibilities, and teal is for professional development opportunities.



When leading in-person programming as part of your work, you will notice there is more time out at programs (shown in purple), including set-up, shopping and driving. Notice how the hours vary and include two evenings and one early morning. There are also usually two busy periods for in-person programming each year: March-May and Oct-Dec.

With whom will I be working? Will I work with other AC members?

There are 30+ employees working on Cooking Matters around the country, mostly based in Massachusetts and Colorado. Our MA team is comprised of 6 staff members and 2 AmeriCorps members, and these are the people with whom you will have the most interaction. You will also do some work with the CO staff and AmeriCorps members, particularly during the remote work period. You will also be in contact with Cooking Matters AmeriCorps members across the nation through monthly conference calls. You will also, of course, spend plenty of time working with participants! When we go back to in-person programming, you will also work with our volunteer instructors, site contacts, and nutrition interns.

Where will I be working? Is there out-of-state travel involved?

There is no office space in Massachusetts, so you will be working remotely from your home. We will provide all necessary supplies, including a laptop computer. Shared team program supplies can also be accessed from a storage unit located in Somerville. You may, COVID-dependng, attend 1 out-of-state Cooking Matters/Share Our Strength conference. All expenses for airfare, meals, and hotel are covered.

How much money will I make?

Honestly, not much. The AmeriCorps stipend is \$18,250. You will be paid twice a month and each check will be approximately \$700 before taxes. AmeriCorps members are also eligible for SNAP benefits (formerly called Food Stamps; the max per month is \$192 for food), a basic health insurance plan, and childcare (based on income eligibility).

Is there any other compensation?

Yes! You can apply for loan forbearance which postpones your obligation to make student loan payments during your service year. Contingent upon successful completion of service, you also receive the following: 1. The National Service Trust will pay all or a portion of the interest that accrued on a **qualified** student loan during your term of national service. 2. The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of \$6,095, which may be used **only** to pay education costs or to repay **qualified** student loans. Members have seven years to use this benefit. Awards and payments towards loan interest are considered taxable income in the year that the Corporation makes the payment to the school or loan holder.

What is a qualified student loan? Can I use the education award in any other way?

A qualified loan is backed by the federal government under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (except PLUS Loans to parents of students), or under Titles VII or VIII of the Public Health Service Act. You may also use the education award towards past educational expenses at a school that is listed as Title IV and offers federal student aid. To find qualified schools, visit finaid.org or fafsa.ed.gov. Other excellent resources are available on how to use the award [here](#).

Will you help me find an apartment in Massachusetts?

No. You are responsible for finding your own accommodations. The Cooking Matters national office has some resources to help AmeriCorps members establish a living situation. For Boston specifically, here are a few tips:

- If you have family or friends in the area, work your connections! Perhaps one of them has a room you can rent for cheap, an Air BNB space they would be willing to take off the market for you, etc.
- Craigslist tends to be the most helpful apartment search tool, with people trying fill a room in an apartment. There are also many other apartment search tools for the Boston area.
- A helpful Facebook group you can look at is “Boston Housing, Rooms, Apartments, Sublets.”
- Try looking for housing slightly outside center Boston, at neighborhoods like Allston/Brighton, East Boston, Chelsea, Jamaica Plain, Somerville/Cambridge, Medford, or Quincy/Braintree, where prices may be more affordable.
- If preferred, here is a list of income restricted housing options: <https://www.boston.gov/metrolist>
- You can apply for Section 8 housing, but we suggest it as a last resort as it will be a somewhat involved process.

Will I be able to improve professionally through this position? Will I make personal connections?

Absolutely! This position will provide you with many experiences that can prepare you for your next career move. You will have bi-weekly meetings with your supervisor and monthly team meetings as a base for training and support. This work will provide you the opportunity to strengthen your communication and organization skills, and enhance your public speaking, interpersonal skills, and management abilities. Additionally, we are working hard to find ways to connect personally, given the transition to remote work due to COVID. We save time for team reflections, virtual gatherings, and getting to know each other. Our hope is that this position will give you professional experience as well as friendships, mentors, and positive memories to carry beyond your AmeriCorps year.
