

Volunteer Organization Profile: Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (ICVS)

Volunteering in America 2011

Every year, communities across the nation prepare for, respond to, and begin to recover from natural disasters. In 2008, historic flooding devastated Eastern Iowa, damaging some 5,390 houses and 1,049 commercial properties, displacing thousands of people, and causing 86 of Iowa's 99 counties to be declared disaster zones. As flooding continues to be an ongoing challenge for Iowans, the need for volunteers has never been greater.



To assist in addressing the vital need for volunteers across the state, the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (ICVS), a state-wide commission headquartered in Des Moines, is dedicated to promoting service and working with communities to build volunteer capacity and infrastructure that provides essential disaster relief services including coordinating cleanup efforts, placing sandbags, distributing food and clean water, and implementing weatherization and recycling programs. In addition, ICVS has created volunteer centers across a majority of Iowa's counties that make it possible for volunteers to address essential needs in areas beyond disaster recovery including education, public safety, health services, and environmental sustainability.

Patti Fields, who serves as the chairwoman of ICVS is also the vice president of Community Impact for the United Way of Johnson County in Iowa City and the director of a regional volunteer center serving Johnson, Washington, and Iowa counties, an expansion of services made possible through the Corporation for National and Community Service's (CNCS) Volunteer Generation Fund—a program designed to increase the number of people who serve in meaningful volunteer roles. In her role at the regional volunteer center, Patti has seen firsthand that building volunteer infrastructure through organizations like volunteer centers is not only important, it is critical.

“Harnessing and focusing the power of spontaneous volunteers during and after a disaster were critical to our community's recovery from the Flood of 2008,” said Patti. “The mobilization efforts of identifying needs and coordinating volunteers to respond helped our community recover faster and brought a level of comfort and support that highlighted the community's resiliency.”

Patti is not just a leader in the volunteer sector however; she is also an avid volunteer. In addition to her volunteer position at ICVS, she is also chair of the Iowa City School Board—leading one of Iowa's largest and highest performing school districts on a voluntary basis.

“As a volunteer at an early age, I felt the impact that one person can make in the life of another; and the person who was changed forever from that experience was me,” Fields commented. “There is nothing more important to addressing community needs than volunteer service. Across Iowa, this spirit of neighbors helping neighbors is alive in every community—it really defines Iowa.”

Since 2010, ICVS has been working on a major volunteer initiative that is made possible through the Volunteer Generation Fund. The initiative focuses on ensuring that volunteers are being properly managed and trained by their organizations and aims to increase volunteer numbers and retention rates. The funding provided through the Volunteer Generation Fund is critical in creating new, and expanding existing volunteer connector organizations across the state.

ICVS is closely aligned with CNCS and its programs, with more than 930 AmeriCorps members and 6,500 Senior Corps volunteers serving throughout the state. CNCS has invested \$18.4 million to support Iowa communities over the last year. In 2010 alone, CNCS’ support led to the recruitment of 100,000 additional volunteers; nearly 12,000 more youth had safe places to learn and play during after-school hours; and more than 20,000 additional sandbags were placed to hold back rising flood waters.

More information about the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service is available at www.volunteeriowa.org. You can also follow ICVS on twitter: @VolunteerIowa, like ICVS on Facebook at www.facebook.com/VolunteerIowa or view ICVS photos at www.flickr.com/photos/59088590@N03/.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs, and leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.