

Next Generation Service Corps celebrates a decade of building leaders for a complex world

Intensive program teaches students to collaborate with community partners

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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In high school, Sami Mooney was “a student council kid,” always looking for a way to be involved and already thinking about public service as a career.

So she was excited to join the newly launched [Next Generation Service Corps](#) as a first-year student at Arizona State University in fall 2015.

“In that first cohort, we didn't get to see past student stories, but I think by then I already had an identity with public service, knowing I'd want to make a difference,” Mooney said.

Mooney, who graduated in 2019, is now one of nearly 650 Sun Devils who served in the ASU Next Generation Service Corps, which is celebrating its [10th anniversary](#) this week. Many of them have gone on to careers in public service.

With a degree in justice studies, a minor in nonprofit management and a certificate in cross-sector leadership, Mooney served in Teach for America after graduating and is now in a shared role with the Colorado Workforce Development Council and the Colorado Department of Education. She works to help schools respond to the needs of the labor market.

This year, 488 ASU students are in the corps, representing 151 majors across 13 ASU colleges and all four campuses.

The intent of the corps is to produce leaders who are prepared to face complex problems and the concept was always meant to be scaled. The corps concept is now at 27 institutions, including Penn State University and the University of Wisconsin.

Housed under the [Public Service Academy](#) in the [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#), the program is an intense commitment for students. There are three parts:

Academic: Students take coursework and earn a certificate in cross-sector leadership through the School of Public Affairs.

Internships: Each member is expected to complete three internships, one each in the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

Service and leadership: The members join student-led mission teams, tackling social issues they're passionate about, such as homelessness, climate change and criminal justice.

One major goal of the corps is to create a military-civilian connection. Corps members travel with Air Force ROTC members from ASU to a national leadership conference every year, and current corps members have worked on storytelling with veterans and took a tour of the Yuma Marine Corps Air Station.

"That was really focused on leadership and how future leaders are prepared through military service and how it has a similar ethos and values and preparation for civilian leadership," said Cindy Parnell, chief of public service at ASU who holds the Michael M. Crow and Sybil Francis Endowed Directorship at ASU's Public Service Academy.

Mooney said the corps was like a North Star for her college experience.

"I wasn't just trying to find an internship, I was trying to find one that would specifically expose me to what I wanted to do and how I wanted to do it," she said.

"And the other piece that makes all the work worth it is the cohort experience. It's a skill to learn how to lean on your community and have people around you that care about character and ethics and impact.

"As an adult, when I'm at difficult decision points, I still have people who get that bigger purpose."

Brett Hunt, founding executive director of the Public Service Academy and Next Generation Service Corps, has worked to spread the corps' concept to other universities. He said he tells them that finding the right students is key — and that doesn't necessarily mean the valedictorians and the star athletes.

"Get students who are genuinely passionate about serving something larger than themselves and curious as to how they might go out and have an impact in the world," he said.

"And if you get those students in your program with that passion and that curiosity, then you can add the components that they need to unlock their potential.

“Things are moving here at ASU and we're producing the leaders we need for the challenges we face at scale.”

'I'm making a difference'

Most Next Generation Service Corps members enter as first-year students. A small group of transfer students from Arizona community colleges are accepted to participate in a two-year adaptation of the program.

New this fall is a track for currently enrolled ASU students. The 10 Accelerated Federal Career Track students are earning a master's degree in public administration as part of the experience. After graduating with their bachelor's degrees, they'll spend a year at ASU's Washington Center completing their master's degree plus an internship in the D.C. area.

All members of the corps are eligible for tuition scholarships. That was one draw for Matthew Bird, a third-year journalism major from Missouri.

“Originally it was a scholarship program for me because I didn't know anything about cross-sector collaboration, which is the core of the NGSC. And then when I found out about it, I was like, ‘Wait, this is something I'm really interested in.’ And I became very involved.”

Bird is especially proud of his mission team's project with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Arizona. The students created an “Access and Leadership Day” for high schoolers, who visited campus to hear about how to afford ASU.

“Students who didn't think that ASU was a possibility for them had the opportunity to see how they could affordably come to ASU and continue their education,” he said.

In addition to the Next Generation Service Corps, Bird is a community assistant and the president and founder of the Investigative Reporters and Editors organization at ASU. He's also in the chief-of-staff leadership position for the corps, supporting other members.

“Even when there are 14-hour days, I push through it because I know that I'm making a difference and my teams are making a difference,” he said.

Next Generation Service Corps by the numbers

488 students currently in the corps.

43 transfer students from Arizona community colleges.

Admittance from **151** majors across **13** ASU colleges.

147 students from out of state representing **36** states.

94% retention rate.

42% in Barrett, The Honors College.

22% first-generation college goers.

24% high or very high financial need.

646 alumni.

NGSC Alumni is the **22nd** specialty chapter in the ASU Alumni Association.

Over the 10 years, the corps experience has been tweaked. About a year ago, the team added a student-support position, according to Kim Baldwin, director of the Next Generation Service Corps.

“We did a really thorough evaluation of what needed to stay and what could be reimaged,” Baldwin said.

“What we don’t want to do is ask more and more of these students who are already doing so much.”

The staff guides the students in how to be efficient, such as combining internships for their major and for the corps.

“We tell our students to think about the NGSC requirements, take everything else you want for yourself in college, everything that’s required for your major and pull it all together and craft an NGSC experience that is unique to you, that helps you meet your goals and that meets the requirements,” she said.

Additionally, the tenets of [Principled Innovation](#) have been fused into the program. Students receive a guide to help them as they work in the community.

“It’s a tool to make sure that our students are being really thoughtful and developing reciprocal relationships,” Baldwin said.

Supporting other universities

The intent of the program was always to scale the concept to other universities.

Earlier this year, the Next Generation Service Corps Center was launched to help support those programs. The center, a collaboration between the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions and the Volker Alliance, offers best practices, curation, resource libraries and training to the network of 27 schools to help them launch and sustain their programs.

Hunt shares his insights from 10 years of experience with the startup programs.

“There were many things we tried and many of them stuck and then many of them didn’t. It reinforced to me that ASU is a place you’re incentivized to try things. I work with other universities where that’s not the culture,” he said.

Collaboration within the university is another key ASU feature that drives the success of the corps, Parnell said. That came into play when the team was developing the Accelerated Federal Career Track.

“We worked with many colleges and schools to get their majors mapped to our accelerated program,” she said.

“We are very impressed by the partnerships across the university and the respect that people have for the Next Generation Service Corps to bring their students into this program.”

Hunt said the ability to forge connections internally is not always easy at other universities.

“We are driving that culture. You don't need to build a service day if this other unit is already doing a great service day. Join their service day,” he said.

Finding their passion

The Next Generation Service Corps experience created a direct through line to Mooney's career. She met education innovators and had an internship with Greater Phoenix Leadership, where she saw education and industry leaders come together.

“I constantly flash back to that experience of being that intern in the room,” she said. “It was the first time I said, ‘Oh, that's what I want to do.’ It was the first time I saw organic industry involvement in public education.”

Basil Ribakare, who graduated in 2024 with a degree in psychology, felt a little overwhelmed in his first year in the corps, especially with the internship requirement.

“But it truly pushed me to explore different realms in the three sectors, nonprofit, public and private,” he said.

He interned at the ASU Center for the Study of Race and Democracy, where he helped to organize a [symposium](#).

“I found that to be something I'm very passionate about — equality among the races and trying to define and understand what democracy should look like in our country,” he said.

“I got to focus on Arizona's segregated history and it opened up a world for me to meet civil rights legends and practice leadership and speaking. And that drew me toward the public sector.”

Ribakare credited Baldwin and Hunt with guiding him.

“They would hear the things that I was passionate about and they encouraged me to explore a world that I wasn't familiar with and that led me to where I'm at now,” said Ribakare, who is pursuing a master's degree in public administration under the Marvin Andrews Jane Morris Fellowship.

“I want to dedicate my career to working in local government, possibly a city manager or assistant city manager,” he said.

“If you had asked me freshman year, I never would've said this.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Current members of the Next Generation Service Corps are shown during their retreat. The corps, housed in the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, is marking its 10th anniversary. The corps experience teaches students how to collaborate with community partners and prepares them to face the complex problems in the world today. Courtesy photo

Gallery



Students in the Next Generation Service Corps join student-led mission teams that tackle social issues such as homelessness, working with partners in the community.



In November 2024, Next Generation Service Corps member Isabelle Kolnacki and Mirabella at ASU resident Bill Gates chatted at an event for the Co-Generational Mission Team. Both were members of the team.



Basil Ribakare (left) sits with fellow Next Generation Service Corps member Kyron Pollard. Ribakare graduated in 2024 with a degree in psychology and is now pursuing a master's in public administration. Pollard is a senior majoring in business entrepreneurship.



Lorena Austin, who graduated from ASU in 2020, is the first alum of the Next Generation Service Corps to be elected to public office. She is a member of the state House of Representatives, representing Mesa.



BrieAnna Frank (right) conducted a mock interview during an Army ROTC training exercise at the Papago Military Reservation in Phoenix in 2015 as part of the Next Generation Service Corps. Frank, who was a first-year journalism major at the time, is now a reporter for USA Today. The corps experience includes fostering connections between civilians and the military.