



# VISTA COHORT 1 SUMMARY

2020-2021 COLORADO IMMUNITY CORPS

## BACKGROUND:

In February of 2020, Immunize Colorado received funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to facilitate an AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program. This VISTA program, called the Colorado Immunity Corps, placed eight national service volunteers at six different community health sites across the state of Colorado. The AmeriCorps VISTA program is a national, federally-funded volunteer program that began in 1965 with the intention of building capacity within community organizations. Its overarching goal is to reduce poverty in vulnerable communities under one of four focus areas; Economic Opportunity, Veterans and Military Families, Education, and Healthy Futures. Since VISTA service focuses on long-term solutions to poverty, rather than simply making poverty more tolerable, its members must take on a planning and organization role at their respective organizations, though they may engage in limited direct service to supplement their planning and coordination efforts. This largely involves taking on a leadership role by streamlining existing programs and services, recruiting volunteers, and developing new programs and events at these organizations.

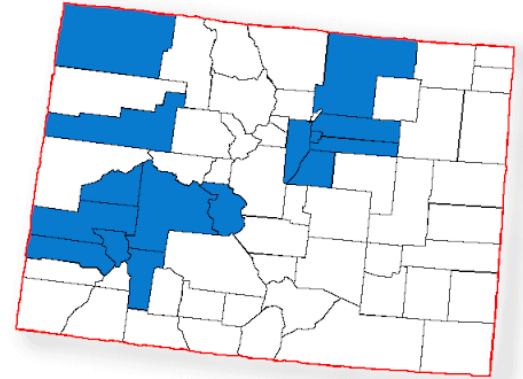
The Colorado Immunity Corps operates under the “Healthy Futures” category by pursuing a goal of making vaccinations and immunizations more affordable, accessible, and acceptable within vulnerable communities in Colorado. This not only creates more touch-points with the medical system and creates opportunities to increase trust in the medical system, but it also directly impacts poverty in these areas by decreasing medical spending and preventing parents or caregivers from having to take sick days for either themselves or to care for a loved one. Healthcare costs related to vaccine-preventable diseases can add up – in fact, in 2019, healthcare costs for Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs) totaled 1.8 million in the state of Colorado alone. This figure does not include economic losses from lost wages from caring for ill individuals, nor the developmental costs of missing school or childcare for children. Thus, the Colorado Immunity Corps positions itself as a team that reduces poverty long-term within communities by increasing education about and access to preventative healthcare services, with a focus on immunizations across the lifespan.

Immunize Colorado’s role in facilitating this program involved providing training and technical support to each VISTA, training their supervisors at each host site for the specifics behind AmeriCorps supervision, providing training and opportunities for professional development, and handling all of the administrative work and communication with AmeriCorps State and National and the CNCS. Immunize Colorado also took on program recruitment by posting and disseminating the VISTA assignment description to job boards and relevant partnering organizations. Host sites took on the responsibility of directly supervising each VISTA member, providing them with resources to effectively complete tasks at the organization, reporting on their progress, and offering site-specific training to the members.

## BACKGROUND (CONTINUED):

In all, eight members were recruited for the Colorado Immunity Corps in its inaugural year. Two were placed at Immunize Colorado in Aurora to do work in metro Denver counties, including Adams, Arapahoe, Douglas, and Denver county, and two were placed at the Jefferson County Health Department. One VISTA was placed at Chaffee County, Gunnison County, Garfield County, and Weld County, respectively. Gunnison County is part of the West Central Public Health Partnership, which benefits Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel Counties. Members volunteered full-time for one year of service, and they began their service on a rolling start date, with the first of the eight members beginning on June 1, 2020, and the last beginning on October 26, 2020. This allowed for local health departments to get urgent help while members were still being recruited for additional host sites.

Colorado Immunity Corps Locations



Source: Synops.net (5)

## PROGRAM GOALS:

While the Colorado Immunity Corps was initially conceived with the intention of increasing education and access for routine immunizations, some of these efforts were put on pause to deal with the mounting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, every VISTA member had to focus, at least partially, on access and education for COVID-19 vaccination, rather than what they had originally planned. However, each member maintained the same goals as were originally outlined in their Assignment Description. They were expected to create one educational intervention and one intervention to increase access to care, like an immunization clinic, and each of these needed to be tailored to a population within their community that demonstrated a health disparity in education or access. To break this overarching outcome down further, each member had the same goals:

- Recruit and/or manage 25 volunteers (200 across the cohort) – these could be recruited through any channel of communication, and could be involved in education, direct service, or organizational capacity building activities.
- Provide capacity building for 10 organizations (80 across the cohort) – this could involve recruiting volunteers for each organization, providing additional structure to their existing systems, creating sustainable programs and services, and providing training to other staff or volunteers to streamline program systems.

## PROGRAM GOALS (CONTINUED)

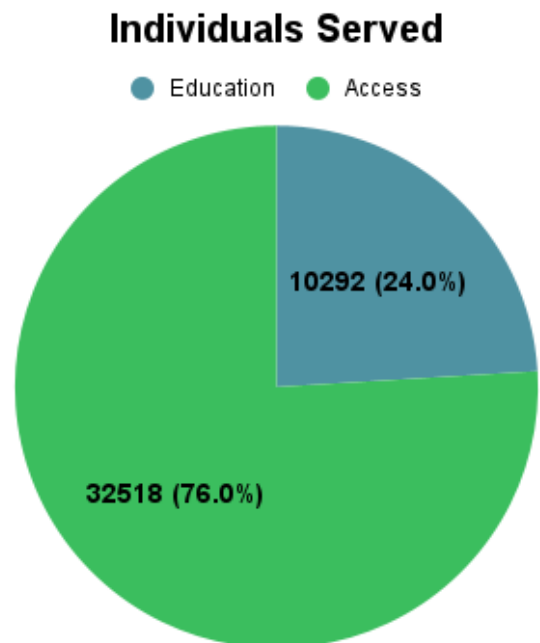
- Increase efficiency or reach for 7 organizations (56 across the cohort) – this can involve providing training or structure to increase the efficiency and efficacy of organization programs and structure. In addition, it can involve recruiting participants for organization programs, among other activities.
- Serve 100 individuals (800 across the cohort):
  - Increase health knowledge for 50 individuals – this can include 1-1 direct education with community members, giving presentations to individuals in the population of interest, and creating tailored educational materials via print, media, or social media to be disseminated on organizational channels.
  - Increase access to healthcare services for 50 individuals – This can involve either facilitating immunization events, or creating programs and systems that connect individuals with or remove barriers to accessing healthcare services.



## PROGRAM IMPACTS:

Due to the unexpected need created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the hard work of VISTAs and their host sites, the program far exceeded its initial goals. They served, in total, 42,810 individuals through both education interventions and direct service, many of these through mass COVID-19 vaccination sites that they had a large hand in organizing.

They increased access to health care services for 32,518 people, and reached 10,292 people through educational interventions that included healthcare provider education, HPV education, contact tracing efforts, and COVID-19 education for their communities.

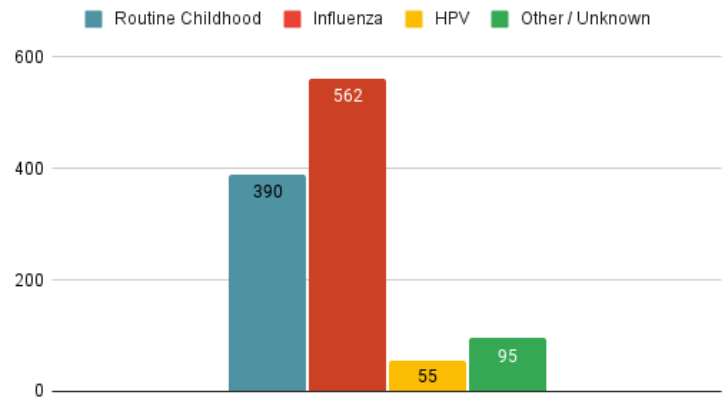


## PROGRAM IMPACTS (CONTINUED)

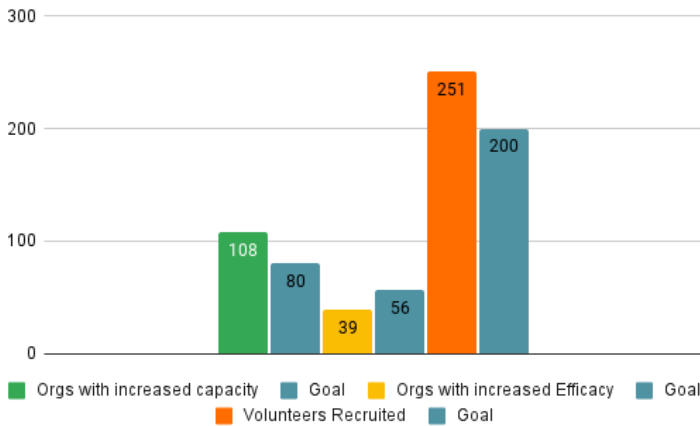
Finally, it is important to measure their impact beyond COVID-19, since routine immunizations remain vital to the health of vulnerable communities. 1,047 individuals received over 1,300 routine immunizations, including seasonal influenza, routine childhood immunizations like Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR), and Human papillomavirus (HPV). Finally, 838 community members received education about immunizations other than COVID-19, largely structured around HPV education.

### Vaccinations Outside of COVID-19

Number of individuals served



### Process Metrics vs. Initial Goals



With an initial collective goal of reaching 800 total individuals through education and access interventions, the Colorado Immunity Corps members exceeded the initial goal by over 50 fold. The only collective goal not attained revolved around the number of organizations with increased efficacy and reach, with 39 total being assisted, rather than the set 56. This could partially be due to COVID-19, since mass vaccination sites in the spring did not necessarily need marketing or increased reach to get good participation.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE:

VISTAs worked, during the first three months of their service, to conduct a community health needs assessment so that they could determine who in their particular community was most in need of a tailored intervention. Members designed interventions that focused on refugees and immigrants, rural communities, healthcare provider education, teen and young adult HPV education, young adult advocacy, individuals in the Latinx community, parents, and individuals in the BIPOC community. Months 3-9 were the "implementation phase" of their year of service, meaning that they were to put the information gleaned from their initial assessment into effect by implementing their education and access interventions. Finally, months 9-12 were for evaluation, so they could assess impacts, make adjustments, and create exit documents to assure for a smooth and sustainable transition. While some VISTAs differed from this set guidance, each succeeded in meeting the vast majority of the goals set.



## NOTABLE INTERVENTIONS:

As previously mentioned, VISTA members served a diverse array of populations by completing a variety of activities to increase their respective organization's reach, efficacy, and capacity. One VISTA at Immunize Colorado in Aurora worked partnered with experts in the Somali community to put together an educational event about COVID-19 for Somali adults in Colorado. This VISTA also worked with language experts to begin creating COVID-19 informational materials in various languages other than English. The other VISTA placed at Immunize Colorado worked to put together a guide for facilitating socially distanced routine immunization clinics. This guide provides detailed instructions for immunization providers on how to safely and effectively run community immunization clinics in the midst of a pandemic, and is accompanied by an instructional webinar. Thus, a program called Shots for Tots and Teens, which has been providing free and low-cost routine immunizations in Colorado since 2002, was able to come out of a 6-month COVID-driven hiatus to continue its services.

One VISTA, placed at Jefferson County, not only assisted in the planning and facilitation of drive-up COVID-19 mass immunization clinics, but they also designed a routine immunization education intervention to accompany it. In the intervention, the VISTA approached vehicles who were waiting during their 15-minute post-vaccination observation period to offer education and materials on routine immunizations. Another, also placed at Jefferson County, worked with a small team to create an informational email where citizens could ask questions about COVID-19 testing, the disease itself, and all things immunization. This operation grew, under the guidance of the VISTA, to a staffed operation with multiple full-time staff who answer questions via phone and email.

Other VISTAs carried out interventions that involved a lot of leg work - many participated on an emergency basis in contact tracing and outbreak investigation services. One, placed in Gunnison county, individually called parents whose children were behind on routine vaccinations, and connected them with resources and locations to obtain these. The same VISTA also created a targeted HPV education campaign that sent 750 postcards about HPV vaccination and its benefits to specific families, and saw an up-tick on individuals seeking HPV vaccination at the local health department thereafter. Another, located in Garfield county, created a presentation about the rural county's COVID-19 response and presented it at Public Health in the Rockies, a public health conference specific to Colorado. Their unique strategy to combat COVID-19 was very person-centered, and involved in-depth contact tracing that also prioritized overall health and well-being for each individual that they traced, even assembling a full Spanish-speaking team to assist with tracing efforts.



## NEXT STEPS:

The second cohort of Colorado Immunity Corps members has already begun their service. Additional host sites have been added, however, to include Tri-County Health Department and Denver Health, both in metro Denver. VISTA positions are still open in Gunnison and Chaffee Counties, with recruitment for those positions ongoing.

Cohort #2 will have the same goals as Cohort #1, but they will focus more on improving routine immunization, since COVID-19 mass vaccination sites will not be operating, or at least will not be operating on the same scale as they were in early 2021. Immunize Colorado has taken feedback from cohort #1 into account, and has responded by hiring a VISTA leader who supports the members in Cohort #2 full-time.

For subsequent years, the Colorado Immunity Corps will continue to recruit additional host sites, and will continue to evaluate member experience and capacity for VISTA hosting at current sites, with a goal of placing 10 VISTAs in cohort 3 during 2022-2023. Goals will likely remain the same for the immediate future, though measures may increase as systems within local health departments become more streamlined, and as VISTA projects gain traction within their communities. In all, next steps will involve increasing recruitment strategies for VISTA members, recruiting sites to host two additional VISTAs, or may involve having more sites who have two members, rather than one. Immunize Colorado will continue communicating with host sites on a regular basis, and will continuously re-evaluate program facilitation strategies to incorporate member feedback.

## CONCLUSION:

Immunize Colorado is pleased with the efforts of the first cohort of the Colorado Immunity Corps. It is excited to facilitate another year of service for these dedicated public health professionals, and looks forward to growing the program and continuously evaluating not only its measurable outcomes, but also its member experience as well, in the coming years.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

To the teams at our local health departments and host sites: Thank you for facilitating such positive experiences for our VISTAs, and for fostering growth in the next generation of public health and healthcare professionals. Your dedication and hard work did not go unnoticed.

A special thank you to the following individuals, without whom the first year of this program would not have been possible - thanks you for your hard work, dedication, and passion for mobilizing, supporting, and advocating for your communities.

## 2020-2021 Colorado Immunity Corps Members

**Ellie Dullea** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Immunize Colorado

**Clara Holder** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Chaffee County Public Health

**Amy Bell** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Immunize Colorado

**Olwen Menez** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Jefferson County Public Health

**George Gray** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Weld County Department of  
Public Health and Environment

**Hannah Sullivan** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Jefferson County Public  
Health

**Rylee Wagner** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Gunnison County Health &  
Human Services

**Hannah Fryczynski** - Immunization Outreach & Education Coordinator - Garfield County Public  
Health

Also, thank you to **Katie Waters**, who created an excellent foundation for the Colorado Immunity Corps. Thank you for your passion, dedication, and excitement regarding the conception and implementation of this program.

Keeping Colorado Communities Healthy!

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