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During the very first COVID summer of 2020, through the cold, darkness and isolation in the winter of 2021, a group of public servants, academics, medical professionals, philanthropic foundations and programs focusing on public health began meeting regularly (and of course, virtually) to discuss what New York State could do to even begin to address the pandemic crisis in an effective way and to accelerate the recovery process.

Among this group was the governor's New York State Nonprofit Unit and the New York State Commission on National and Community Service, which ran the State's AmeriCorps programs. When we began, many of these programs were shuttered, with AmeriCorps members and staff sent home and unable to serve in any way other than telecommuting. Commission staff were just beginning to return in a limited way to our offices. And the Omicron variant was raging across the country as summer and fall gave way to winter. But the Commission, the Nonprofit Unit, and our partners kept working, and eventually several initiatives revolving around the AmeriCorps motto to "Get Things Done" began to take shape.

The Commission, in its State Service Plan for 2021-2023, recognized the shifting landscape brought on by COVID and pledged to focus its resources on aiding New Yorkers in dealing with the immediate and longer-term impact and a road to recovery. As a first step, the Commission created and began a VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program that placed AmeriCorps VISTA members at NYS agencies to create assistance and new ways of thinking linked specifically to the COVID concerns of their various constituencies, like veterans, seniors, and the disabled.

We then created a pilot program for a New York AmeriCorps Public Health Corps, with two of our most successful AmeriCorps subgrantees offering to serve as test cases for a larger program to come. We needed the assistance of the federal AmeriCorps agency, which unhesitatingly granted us the ability to create this program off the normal calendar of AmeriCorps funding. We needed the contributions of partners like the Cornell School of Public Health, which offered to pilot a training curriculum for AmeriCorps members in this new venture. And most importantly, we needed the cooperation of our other AmeriCorps programs, who willingly gave up AmeriCorps member slots and accompanying funding that they were unable to use that year to our two pilot programs.

These were extraordinary times, and the level of support we received was astounding. That pilot eventually turned into the largest Public Health AmeriCorps portfolio in the country, funded by over seven million dollars contributed by AmeriCorps and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As AmeriCorps members began assisting with contact tracing and vaccination protocols and took advantage of their learning on the job and from our partners at Cornell and other institutions, we realized that we needed to record our methodologies and what we learned from this experience in a more rigorous way. The New York Community Trust awarded New York State a grant allowing us to do so.

This report reflects the contemporaneous struggles and successes of these public health efforts by AmeriCorps New York. It will allow those who follow us to respond more quickly and more completely to any future pandemics and provides a road map to a faster recovery. Already, many of the principles reflected in this report have become the underpinnings of a new Commission initiative, the New York Youth Mental Health Corps, beginning in the fall of 2025. As public health becomes an ever more critical and challenging issue, we present this report as an example of what works.

Many thanks to our partners who helped us plan, fund and implement this coordinated response to the COVID pandemic. We particularly want to thank The New York Community Trust and Irfan Hasan, our grant officer, as well as the author of this report, Stefanie Perez; Laura Trolio at the New York State Department of Health; Gen Meredith and Kathryn Coldren at the Cornell School of Public Health; our host agency, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services; the federal AmeriCorps agency and in particular our portfolio managers Kaitlyn Norden and Rachel Wirt; and our two pilot agencies, the Community Health Association of New York State and the Rural Health Network of South Central New York. The dedicated, hardworking and knowledgeable Commission staff made it possible to turn our plans into actions. Finally, we thank Lillian Padilla and Ben Sheridan, of the New York State Nonprofit Unit, and its fearless leader, Fran Barrett, always our best source of advice, strategy and support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Linda Cohen**  
**Executive Director**