

# ADMISSION POSSIBLE

## *VARIOUS POSITIONS*



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### The Big Picture

Admission Possible is a respected Minnesota nonprofit that guides low-income high school juniors and seniors through the college admissions and financial aid processes. An independent study found that 98 percent of students who completed the Admission Possible program were admitted to college and that more than 80 percent remain enrolled (a far larger percentage than the national average). Most new hires come in through the U.S. government’s AmeriCorps and VISTA programs (sometimes called the “domestic Peace Corps”). Terms of service are ten or twelve months, depending on the position.

#### **LOCATION(S) WHERE ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEES WORK**

All employees work in St. Paul, Minneapolis or Robbinsdale, Minnesota. Currently, 38 AmeriCorps members are placed in high schools throughout the Twin Cities, and 8 operate out of the St. Paul office. New hires may request particular placements but are not assigned until after accepting the job.

#### **AVERAGE NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS EACH YEAR**

“Admission Possible receives about 150 applications each year.”

#### **AVERAGE NUMBER HIRED PER YEAR OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS**

Admission Possible hires about 46 full-timers per year.

#### **ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS AVAILABLE**

This year, 46 entry-level AmeriCorps members have been distributed as college-prep coaches, partnering with other local college access programs, or focusing on Alumni Programming. Other AmeriCorps members tailor student workshops and volunteer activities and coordinate events. The organization adds, “Additionally, about half of our 11-person leadership team holds entry-level positions, all of which are full-time, permanent, and salaried. . . . We will also receive enough funding to fill 46 entry-level positions in each of the next two years in order to serve 1,300 students by 2008–2009.”

### AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER WEEK

New hires work around 50 hours per week.

### AVERAGE STARTING SALARY

AmeriCorps members receive an annual AmeriCorps/VISTA stipend determined by the federal government—in 2006–2007 that amount was \$10,900. After their first and second years, they are “eligible for an education award of \$4,725.”

### BENEFITS OFFERED

AmeriCorps members “receive modest health coverage for the duration of their term of service” and “a variety of clothing (in their size) with the organization’s logo.” They may also use the organization’s laptops when available. Leadership team members “receive a full range of health coverage within one month of their start date” and “a competitive benefits package.”

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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## Getting Hired

Admission Possible “recruit[s] nationally across college campuses” and has a particularly strong relationship with Macalester College and Carleton College, both located in Minnesota, although it seeks students from all colleges and universities. Positions are filled in the spring for the following fall. “To apply, applicants must submit the following materials: cover letter, resume, Admission Possible application (found on our website, [AdmissionPossible.org](http://AdmissionPossible.org)), and an unofficial undergraduate transcript. Once all application materials are reviewed, applicants are invited to a half-day interview . . . which includes a group interview and mock-teaching session. All interviews occur at our main headquarters; however, applicants who are unable to travel from further distances are able to interview by phone and submit a teaching video.” The group interview gets high marks: One hire reports, “While we were waiting to be interviewed, there were current coaches to chat [with], get to know, . . . and answer any questions we had about the job.” Interviewers look for “people who are confident and provide thoughtful answers that are in line with the mission of our organization. [Good candidates] work well in the group interview situation, making their voice[s] heard without dominating the group or appearing to be too pushy.” According to the organization, the ideal new hire has “an interest in working with high school youth, a ‘whatever it takes’ attitude,” and an eagerness to create social change. In addition, “people who prefer a standard nine-to-five workday probably will not be a good fit for our organization, as the demands of students and the requirements of our program require a more flexible approach to scheduling!”

## Money and Perks

Successful new hires consider living their ideals to be a major perk. “I am extremely into social justice . . . the fact that there is an inequality in the American educational system is wrong,” explains an ex-coach. “Is changing the world considered a fringe benefit?” asks another, echoing a comment we hear often among young teachers. Equally rewarding is a sense that one is taking on serious responsibility and accomplishing something recognizably important. “We were there in the trenches every single day. We were the ones students called all the time at any hour of the night, the ones they

looked up to, and the ones they ultimately thanked when they got into college. We were the ones who were celebrated when students did well." All staffers we spoke with considered themselves very important to the organization. "I felt like the backbone of the organization," says one former coach; another says, "The best thing about the job is that you really become the expert on your school and feel a really strong sense of ownership over your school. No one, not even the leadership team of the organization, knows your school as well as you do." The AmeriCorps/VISTA pay may seem grim, but for new hires who pay between \$350 and \$450 a month in rent and use the food stamps for which they are eligible, living on the stipend is "definitely doable." Some AmeriCorps members report small holiday bonuses, but, officially, AmeriCorps and VISTA staffers are "not eligible for raises . . . or monetary bonuses," although "leadership team members are eligible for raises on a case-by-case basis."

## The Ropes

"Orientation for AmeriCorps and VISTA members involves two full weeks of programming and training" with weekly additional follow-up throughout the year. Session topics "range from cultural competence to office skills, financial aid basics to professionalism in the work place, and team-building to essay-editing skills." They "are planned around the understanding that, for most of our staff, this is their first job experience after completing college." Orientation takes place "in various community spaces and [on various] campuses, including an overnight all-staff retreat at a beautiful lakeside retreat center outside of the metro area." New hires learn from the experts. "We had a teaching workshop with a teacher at the Blake School, a private school in Minneapolis. We went to the Hmong Cultural Center to learn about Hmong history and traditions. We had a woman from the state department of education come talk to us about how to fill out the FAFSA."

## Day in the Life

The typical AmeriCorps member works at a school four days a week and spends Friday in the office, attending meetings and prepping for the coming week. "Because of the very demanding nature of the job, most coaches would arrive at school anytime between 7:00 and 10:00 A.M. and leave anytime from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M." However, "we were never told that we had to arrive at an official time and leave at an official time." One staffer describes a common routine: "Most of the school days were filled with students dropping by for various needs . . . I would have to plan the after-school session for the day, which might involve creating and photocopying handouts, creating individual action plans for each student, doing online research for various opportunities for students." She continues, "I spent a lot of time on the phone with various colleges, tracking applications, asking about admission policies, talking to the counselors about specific student situations . . . There were also weekend commitments [that included] college visits, practice ACT [tests], and volunteer activities." As hectic as the week can be, Friday can be just as stressful, albeit for different reasons. "Every week at the Friday morning meeting there is a list of everyone's statistics on [topics including] ACT score improvement, number of colleges applied to/accepted at, [and] amount of scholarship money won. Although no one was ever singled out or made to feel bad about their numbers, and everyone understood that sometimes you just have a bad student, it still feels lousy to have low numbers in something."

## Peers

A longtime staffer calls the organization "very youthful [and] open-minded." First jobbers are "ambitious and successful, [qualities they] turn toward their work with their students." New hires "become very close." "There were times at Friday meetings," says an ex-staffer, "when I would think, I am sitting in a room with twenty-five of the smartest people I have ever met." We're told that "it is more common than not that [colleagues] become best friends, travel together, and even find life partners!"

## Moving on

After a one- or two-year term of service, AmeriCorps members go on in large numbers to graduate and professional schools [including] “Harvard, University of California—Berkeley, Stanford, and many other top graduate programs across the country.” Others move on to nonprofits or “undergraduate admissions or college access programs.” A few are promoted to outreach, public relations, or communications positions within the company. One coach turned grad student calls the day that her term concluded “one of the saddest days of my life.”

## Attrition

“Though our hiring structure is such that entry-level employees are contracted for a term of service that consists of a ten- or twelve-month agreement . . . nearly one-third of our recent college graduates do extend their initial commitment” for at least an additional year. “No full-time entry-level person has ever voluntarily left our organization before completing their term of service.”

## Best and Worst

“The most successful Admission Possible entry-level employee was an AmeriCorps member who . . . was energetic, self-motivated, and ready to take on an opportunity that she knew would be difficult but incredibly rewarding. She was a relentless advocate for her students [and] a strong leader among her peers, leading not only by the example of her high-quality work, but also by her willingness to step up to additional responsibilities . . . [S]he was able to keep ‘the big picture’ vision of our organization, while not losing sight of the details and deadlines of her day-to-day work.” In contrast, one employee “was looking for a nine-to-five position that wouldn’t require any additional thought after she left work” and “disagreed with the organization’s emphasis on results.” She was terminated.