**Nebraska Conservation Education Fund, Best New Program**

Nebraska Conservation Educational Fund (NCEF) AmeriCorps State program, subgrantee of ServeNebraska and launched September 1, 2017, is nominated for the Best New Program category. NCEF is nominated by Christina Franklin (christina.franklin@nebraska.gov), ServeNebraska Program Officer. Nebraska Conservation Educational Fund (NCEF) believes that protecting and conserving Nebraska’s environment and natural resources requires a population that is well-informed and engaged in environmental stewardship and environmentally conscious practices. Unfortunately, the quality of Nebraska’s environment does not exhibit robust environmental stewardship. One example is that Nebraska’s waterways are the sixth worst in the nation for toxic pollution. The lack of environmental stewardship is not concentrated in any particular part of the state. It is distributed throughout, calling for a statewide response. NCEF quickly realized they would need to enhance their program to be able to make the impact needed in Nebraska to change individuals’ views on environmental stewardship and environmentally conscious practices. AmeriCorps was the perfect way to collaborate and combine resources to make this possible. NCEF has 8 full-time members and will be enrolling 4 minimum-time members in the summer. NCEF AmeriCorps Members conduct ongoing training, educational activities and service learning programming in twenty-five communities across Nebraska, from the far east to the far west, metropolitan to rural. The members also improve knowledge of and concern for environmental stewardship through direct service by organizing educational and service learning activities and building community around conservation. They hold one-on-one discussions with local conservation professionals and fellow community members, develop partnerships with a diverse set of stakeholders, including business leaders, conservation professionals, and organizations that assist low-income and other marginalized groups. Collaboration with community partners is essential for the success of this program. Halfway through their first grant year NCEF has partnered with sixty-four organizations. These partnerships are nurtured by AmeriCorps members in the communities in which they serve. NCEF has reached 883 individuals with education and training in environmental stewardship. 351 of the individuals have increased knowledge in the area of environmental stewardship and 319 individual have changed or will be changing their behavior regarding environmental stewardship. In their first quarter alone, 72% of survey respondents indicated that this was their first time participating in a community conversation about environmental stewardship. Program Leader, Chelsea Johnson, Deputy Director of NCEF, said “I am so impressed by the service that our AmeriCorps members have completed in the first year of this program. They are not only engaging new people, they are building deep relationships and engendering progress on environmental stewardship that would not have been possible without the support of AmeriCorps and ServeNebraska. NCEF is looking forward to further expanding the program in the coming year, and diving deeper into each community. Our goal is to build an infrastructure of people across the state who care about conservation and take initiative to improve their local environment, and AmeriCorps has put us on the right track to achieving this goal.”