FEMA Corps Team Gulf 4 Supports Philadelphia Vaccination Outreach Efforts

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PHILADELPHIA, PA – FEMA Corps team Gulf 4 launched their first service mission in Philadelphia on April 24, 2021 in support of the City's Vaccination Mission. The team has been providing assistance at the Center City Vaccination Center (CCVC) located at the Pennsylvania Convention Center (PCC). The CCVC was initially equipped to distribute up to 6,000 vaccinations per day, an operation successfully managed by a united effort between FEMA, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management, and the Department of Defense. On May 25th, operations at the Pennsylvania Convention Center vaccination clinic transferred back to city-led efforts with some support from FEMA operations and logistics staff.





Caption: The FEMA Corps Gulf 4 team arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 24, 2021. (Photo by FEMA)

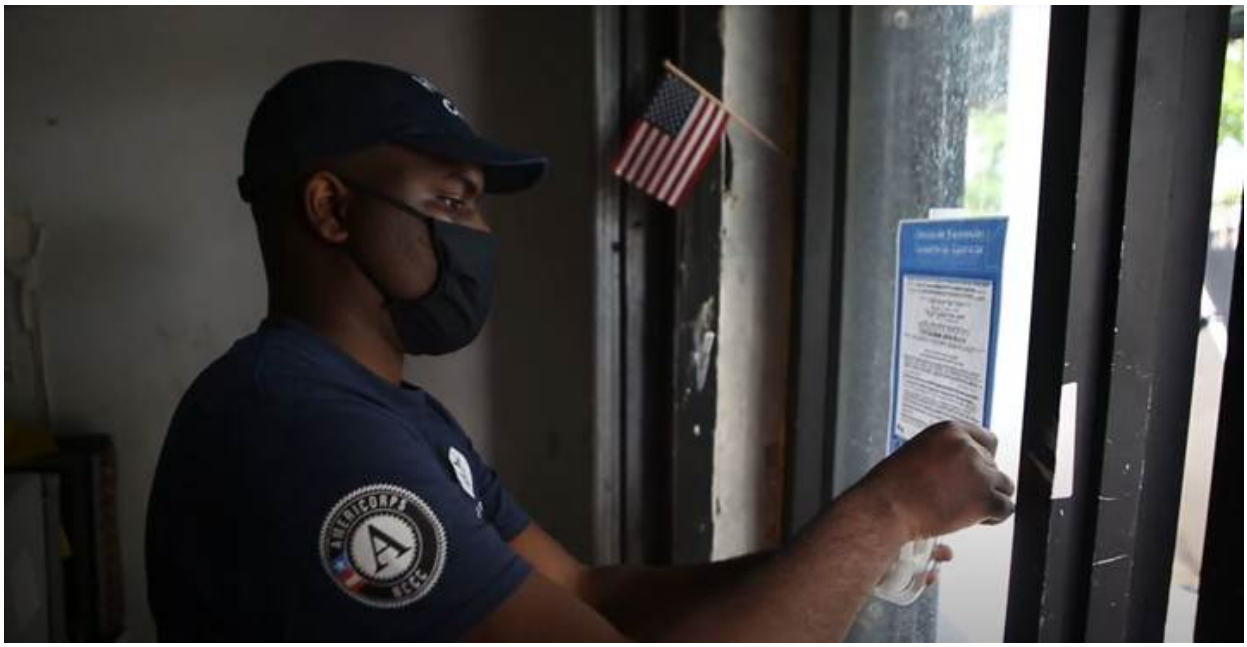
FEMA Corps is a partnership between AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and FEMA, which assembles, trains, deploys and develops teams of young adults aged 18-26 years old to work in emergency management and disaster situations. Several other FEMA Corps teams have deployed across the US and throughout FEMA's Region 3, including the Wave 6 team in Washington, DC assisting with the city's DC Buddies vaccination initiative and a team in West Virginia supporting the statewide volunteer management for the vaccination mission. Gulf 4 consists of seven college graduates hailing from Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, and Indiana, with experience in environmental studies, religious studies, business and logistics, interpersonal communications, and political science. The team received training in Vicksburg, Mississippi and Grapevine, Texas before being mobilized to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to begin their first round of service.

Gulf 4 members are assigned to work as general support specialists at the CCVC, tasked with duties such as determining eligibility for a vaccine, wellness checks for individuals entering the facility, providing accessibility and functional needs support, and traffic control. While the team's responsibilities have expanded over the course of the mission, they started by supporting the outreach mission of the External Affairs Office, which mobilized FEMA staff, AmeriCorps, FEMA Corps, and City of Philadelphia staff. Outreach missions involved traveling to under-vaccinated areas in Philadelphia to pass out flyers and wallet-sized cards with information about the FEMA-supported community vaccination clinics as well as free SEPTA transit passes to community members. Gulf 4 engaged with the wider community daily, traveling to commercial districts all around Philadelphia.

"While conducting outreach, we engaged dozens of community members each day who otherwise may not have had the information needed to get a vaccine," said Gulf 4 member Hunter Parker, of Indiana. "For me, it was a great experience to be in the communities and lend a hand to people who aren't getting equitable treatment."

Omar Lloyd of Baltimore, Maryland, serves as Gulf 4's Community Outreach Specialist. He echoed that sentiment. "Outreach strengthened our service experience at the CCVC and gave us the opportunity to speak with Philadelphia residents in their own neighborhoods," he said. "Connecting with people face-to-face in a digital age is a great way to build relationships with them. I think it shows we are willing to make every effort to reach them."





Caption: Omar Lloyd, FEMA Corps team Gulf 4 member, hangs a flyer while canvassing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Photo by Andy Avitt/U.S. Forestry Service)

Anna Jarrell spoke to the exceptional teamwork among those providing service at the CCVC. “It’s been great getting to know the FEMA, City, and uniformed servicemember staff. There is such a strong camaraderie among them. Everyone looks out for each other and shares their unique experiences with us. Even when the days are long, there’s always someone to learn from and work alongside.”

In addition to FEMA Corps members’ roles as support specialists, some members were trained to take on new roles on May 26th when the site transitioned from a FEMA-supported site to a City-run site. Hunter Parker and Cassie James were trained as vaccine runners and communications leads, and Gulf 4 team leader Darby McMonagle and Corps Members Matthew Brethen, Luke Hendley, and Jarrell were trained to work in registration. “Vaccine running lets us observe other parts of the operation, like seeing the vaccines get drawn and working with nurses,” said James. “We’ve now gotten to see the whole process. A lot of hard work goes into the bigger picture of the vaccination mission.”



Caption: FEMA Corps Gulf 4 team leader Darby McMonagle strategizes canvassing outreach efforts with staff from FEMA, FEMA Corps, and AmeriCorps. (Photo by Andy Avitt/U.S. Forestry Service)

“The team has been professional and present in their work with FEMA personnel, even on challenging days,” noted McMonagle. “We support, strength, and motivate each other to continue putting our best effort forward. It’s been incredible watching my team progress and grow into their strengths and responsibilities as Corps Members.

The team will continue to support the City of Philadelphia’s vaccination operations at the Convention Center until June 15th.