



National Service:

Providing Pathways to Employment

A Report by
Voices for National Service

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voicesforservice.org

national service – five fast facts

National service has a strong history of bipartisan support.

Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama have all made important contributions to build, strengthen and expand support for national service programs.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) makes national service possible.

CNCS, the largest provider of federal grants to support national service programs, distributes federal funds to more than 70,000 national and local nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and municipal agencies. Together, grantees engage more than 5 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to their communities each year. Grantees also match each federal dollar with private sector, philanthropic, or foundation funds.

National service guarantees a high return on taxpayer investment.

For every federal dollar invested, national service members, on average, deliver as much as \$3.00 worth of services. Thus, between the \$3.00 worth of services and the \$1.00 in private sector, philanthropic or foundation funds, national service programs yield \$4.00 for each federal dollar invested.

Historic numbers of Americans want to serve their country.

Young Americans are lining up to serve their country in record numbers with AmeriCorps applications jumping from approximately 360,000 in 2009 to more than 582,000 in 2011, a 62 percent increase over the past two program years. Only 82,500 AmeriCorps slots are currently available, denying hundreds of thousands of Americans the opportunity to serve their country and build essential workplace skills.

National service members address critical local and national need.

The future of our nation and the American labor force depends on our ability to provide all Americans with a good education, affordable housing, and jobs. National service programs address each of these areas. Organizations that rely upon funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service help to keep students on-track to high school graduation, work with low-income families to secure affordable housing and prevent foreclosure, fuel disaster relief efforts, and are among the largest employers of young Americans.

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Voices for National Service relies on its many individual and corporate partners to support its work ensuring the continued success of the Corporation for National and Community Service. In particular, we want to recognize the unique role that the Ford Foundation plays in supporting our work.

The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of Voices for National Service and do not necessarily represent the views of the funders or original researchers.

about CNCS

The Corporation for National and Community Service

The Corporation for National and Community Service is the nation's largest federal grant maker in support of service and volunteering. **CNCS provides grants to more than 70,000 national and local nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and municipal agencies**, which leverage the federal dollars to meet the goals of CNCS's five programs. These programs include:

- **AmeriCorps:** AmeriCorps provides opportunities for more than 80,000 Americans each year to give intensive service to their communities and country through three programs: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps).
- **Senior Corps:** Each year Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of more than 330,000 Americans age 55 and older to meet a wide range of community challenges through three programs: RSVP, the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program.
- **Social Innovation Fund:** The Social Innovation Fund mobilizes public and private resources to grow the impact of promising, innovative community-based solutions that have evidence of compelling results in three areas of priority need: economic opportunity, healthy futures and youth development.
- **The Volunteer Generation Fund:** The Volunteer Generation Fund strengthens the nation's civic infrastructure by helping nonprofits recruit, manage, and support more volunteers.

Together, these programs empower 5 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve in their communities each year, and leverage nearly \$1 billion in philanthropic, corporate and foundation dollars to deliver locally determined solutions to pressing community challenges.^[xiv]

presidential support for national service

In times of economic uncertainty, Presidents from both parties have expanded national service programs to ensure citizens' needs are met in a cost-effective, efficient way.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide jobs and needed services to communities nationwide. Following the creation of the CCC, unemployment fell sharply, from 24.8 percent in 1933 to 14.2 percent in 1937.

President George H.W. Bush created the first office of national service in the White House, signed the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1990, which created the Commission on National and Community Service, and founded the Points of Light Foundation to foster volunteering. Bush approved grants to schools to support service-learning through Serve America.

With the signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, **President Bill Clinton** created AmeriCorps. Clinton said, "Service is a spark to rekindle the spirit of democracy in an age of uncertainty."

President George W. Bush urged Americans to devote 4,000 hours to volunteer service in their lifetimes. Bush created the USA Freedom Corps and expanded AmeriCorps.

In the wake of the financial crisis, **President Barack Obama** signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which marked the largest expansion of service since the formation of AmeriCorps, and created the Social Innovation Fund. At the bill signing, President Obama shared that national service "supports innovation and strengthens the nonprofit sector. And it is just the beginning of a sustained, collaborative and focused effort to involve our greatest resource – our citizens – in the work of remaking this nation."



providing pathways to employment

Introduction

For decades, national service has played a critical role in fueling the community solutions that address pressing local problems. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is the largest federal funder of these essential national service efforts. Through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund, CNCS leverages federal dollars to cost-effectively meet pressing community needs. While serving, national service members acquire critical skills that propel them towards future career success or help them to enter or re-engage in the workforce. In fact, research shows that the workplace skills national service members acquire during their service term make them more likely to be employed and to earn higher salaries over the course of their lifetimes. Recent reports have shown that VISTA alumni are more likely to be employed and to earn higher wages than are those who do not serve;^[i] and AmeriCorps members experience statistically significant increases in their work skills compared to nonparticipating peers.^[ii]

Right now, it is critical to provide young people of all backgrounds with the skill building opportunities national service programs provide. While serving, young people acquire expertise that is particularly relevant to the rapidly growing nonprofit sector – the third largest industry in America’s economy, employing 10.5 million workers or one tenth of America’s workforce.^[iii] With large percentages of public sector employees set to retire within the next decade – over 50 percent of teachers, for example - this sector is hungry for new talent. At the same time, young people need jobs. Programs supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service are helping to instill the skills that young Americans need to obtain jobs, including the growing number of positions available in the nonprofit sector.

Recognizing that CNCS programs provide a pathway to long-term employment opportunities, young Americans, who have been particularly hard hit by the current economic downturn, are lining up to serve. **AmeriCorps applications jumped from approximately 360,000 in the 2008-2009 program year to more than 582,000 in the 2010 – 2011 program year – a 62 percent increase over the past two program years.**

At a time when millions of individuals, especially young Americans, are struggling to find work, national service programs offer job training, skill-building and pathways to successful careers.

The Challenge

America’s youth (16 – 24 year olds) have fared particularly poorly in the economic downturn, enduring an unemployment rate that is double the national average.^[iv] As Andrew Sum, the Director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University asserts, young people are being disproportionately affected by this recession. These high levels of unemployment are poised to affect this generation’s careers and lives for another decade. Unemployment this early in one’s career can have a detrimental impact on one’s lifetime earnings.^[v]

Prospects are even dimmer for returning veterans. As was recently highlighted in the New York Times, “the unemployment rate for veterans aged 20 to 24 has averaged 30 percent this year.” Many attribute this to the difficulty associated with translating military accomplishments to the civilian workforce.^[vi]

“These people will be scarred, and they will be called the ‘lost generation’.”

Richard Freeman
Harvard University

Young people disengaged from school and work - opportunity youth - face the greatest challenges to employment. With 6.7 million opportunity youth in America today projected to cost the taxpayers \$1.6 trillion in public expenditures related to crime, welfare, and health over the course of their lifetimes, it is critical to re-engage this cohort of young people.^[vii]

The Solution

Helping Young Americans Identify their Career Path and Develop Critical Workplace Skills

Programs supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) provide young people with the skills required to successfully transition from school and less than fulfilling jobs to meaningful careers. While serving their country through CNCS programs, young Americans learn valuable workplace, communications, and

leadership skills.^[viii] This valuable on-the-job training and skill building empowers alumni to explore new career opportunities and motivates many to remain in the field in which they served. For example, Community HealthCorps trains and deploys AmeriCorps members to promote healthcare for America's underserved. During their year of service, AmeriCorps members receive extensive on the job training. As a result, two-thirds of Community HealthCorps alumni, many of whom had no prior experience in the healthcare field, pursued careers as doctors, health educators, social workers, medical assistants, and registered nurses.^[ix] Similarly, 87 percent of Public Allies' 3,200 AmeriCorps graduates have leveraged the leadership skills they developed with Public Allies to pursue careers in public service.^[x] Finally, Teach for America - a nonprofit organization that deploys AmeriCorps members to teach in our nation's lowest performing

CNCS programs

“Takes an individual who is willing to dedicate a year of his or her life to making communities in each of our states better and give this person an opportunity to learn critical skills while they do this.”

**Governor Haley Barbour
of Mississippi**

schools for two years – inspires 67 percent of its alumni to remain in the education sector. Some work as full time teachers and many as education entrepreneurs, creating some of the most innovative education reform organizations, programs and schools.^[xi]

In addition, national service members develop needed professional skills that make them more competitive when applying for positions. **Sixty-seven percent of AmeriCorps state and national members and 70 percent of AmeriCorps NCCC members state that their service experiences provided them with an advantage in finding a job.**^[xii] Serving with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), a nonprofit organization that empowers students to serve in national parks, forests, and urban communities, prepares young people for the demands of working for the National Park Service. An informal survey by a Director of the National Park Service found that 12 percent of the employees of the National Park Service got their start from serving with SCA. Similarly, City Year deploys teams of 17 – 24 year old full-time AmeriCorps members to provide in class tutoring, mentoring, and after-school programming to our nation's low-performing schools. Sixty percent of City Year alumni credit their City Year experience with providing them with the skills needed to acquire their current job.^[xiii] Lastly, 91 percent of Arizona AmeriCorps members report that their service experience enhanced their skill set, helping them to acquire a job following their service term.^[xiv]

Overall, CNCS alumni from low-income backgrounds are more likely to continue on the path laid by their national service experience: 44 percent of minority and 46 percent of disadvantaged alumni are employed in public service careers versus only 26 percent of comparison groups.^[xv] In the current economic climate, when minority and low income youth are experiencing higher rates of joblessness than are their peers, it is essential to continue to give these young people the opportunity to benefit from the pathways to employment that CNCS programs provide.^[xvi]

Recognizing that national service is a bridge to full-time, fulfilling employment opportunities, young Americans are signing up to serve in large numbers. Employers recognize the critical skills young people acquire during their service term and are eager to hire national service alumni.

“My decision to join VISTA literally changed my life. While my goal was to help the people of Emmons, that community came to help me much, much more. It gave me a new focus on public service which has led me into a fulfilling and meaningful career. VISTA truly is a wonderful service program for young people.”

**U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller
(D-WV)**

There were nearly 7 applications for each AmeriCorps slot for the 2010 – 2011 program year.

“As Comcast became involved with City Year in particular, [we realized] that there were qualities that we were seeing in the graduates of the program that started to look to us to be the very qualities that we were looking for in potential new employees...One is – and this was a surprise to me in particular – a characteristic that I’m going to call the ‘business-like approach’...What we have found is that the people we have started to hire from City Year...into entry-level positions are more focused and efficient.”

Art Block, Comcast’s Senior Vice President and General Counsel, in the 2008 “Leaders for Every Sector” report

Helping Returning Veterans Transition to Civilian Employment

States and local communities across the country recognize that returning veterans are seeking meaningful work that enables them to smoothly make the difficult transition from combat to civilian life. Many localities are leveraging Vet Corps - a CNCS AmeriCorps program that engages returning military veterans in service activities that empower them to support their fellow veterans – to meet this goal.

Iowa is one of the many states leveraging AmeriCorps programs to help returning veterans develop the skills they need to be successful in the civilian workforce. Through the Iowa Green Veteran AmeriCorps program, veterans are connected with employment opportunities in both green jobs and natural resources. Through this program, veterans are partnering with Habitat for Humanity to support disaster relief efforts and to assist rural, low-income, and elderly individuals in identifying and implementing home improvements to reduce energy costs.

The AMVETS Career Center, which provides employment, career and training assistance to Ohio veterans leverages national service members to provide nearly 10,000 hours of career preparation services to veterans throughout Ohio.

Re-engaging Opportunity Youth: National Service as a Bridge to Educational and Workforce Involvement

CNCS programs, especially AmeriCorps, have a record of re-engaging opportunity youth, which is critical to our nation’s future fiscal stability and prosperity. More than half of America’s opportunity youth have been chronically disengaged from school since they were 16 and while the other half have some post-secondary education, they are struggling to find work. In 2011 alone, opportunity youth cost the American taxpayer \$93 billion in lost tax revenue and increased cost of social services.^[xvii]

Organizations leveraging AmeriCorps members have a demonstrated record of re-engaging opportunity youth and setting them on a path to future educational attainment and job security. Both YouthBuild and The Corps Network have been trailblazers in this arena, and their programs have had a transformational effect on participating opportunity youth.

YouthBuild, an AmeriCorps program, engages low-income 16 to 24 year olds in six to twenty-four months of full-time construction work. As participants work together to build affordable housing in their communities, they acquire critical skills and work toward their GED or high school diplomas. At the end of their national service experience, 70 to 80 percent of YouthBuild graduates are placed in post-secondary education or full-time employment, outperforming their non-participating peers.^[xviii] As a result of these positive outcomes for the low-income, minority youth who serve with YouthBuild, researchers estimate that at least \$96,000 and as much as \$146,000 in benefits are generated due to participants’ higher wages and increased productivity.^[xix]

“The GED was the only thing I expected at the time. But look at all the perks that came with the program. We would have guys coming to the school talking to us from companies. They were teaching us how to fill out a job application and resumes. They told me about checking up on jobs and how to talk to people and things like that.”

**A YouthBuild Alum
in the 2004 Report
“Life After YouthBuild”**

The Corps Network has prioritized re-engaging opportunity youth by deploying national service members in crews to strengthen America through service and conservation projects. A three year study published in 2011 by the Corporation for National and Community Service revealed that Corps Network programs have a positive impact on participants' employment levels and educational attainment.^[xx] Specifically, educational enrollment and employment among Corps members increased from 50 percent to 67 percent over the course of the study. In addition, the percentage of Corps members possessing a High School Diploma or GED increased from 57 percent to 82 percent, meaning 58 percent of those Corps members who enrolled without a high school credential obtained one during their tenure in a Corps.

Failing to re-engage opportunity youth is not an option. For our nation's future economic prosperity, we must help these young people find a way back to school and the workforce. National service has a demonstrated record of doing just that.

The diverse group of young people serving our nation through CNCS programs is introduced to new careers and improved educational opportunities through and as a result of their service experience.

Nearly two-thirds of Corps Network participants (63.9 percent) said that their participation in a Corps helped them secure a job, and three out of four (77.1 percent) said the Corps experience gave them a job-hunting advantage.

Leading to Increased Educational Opportunities for Alumni

In addition to helping alumni secure professional opportunities, national service programs can lead to improved educational attainment. In the increasingly global, competitive economy, post-secondary education is becoming more important. On average, college graduates earn double the amount that high school graduates earn over the course of their lifetimes.^[xxi]

Through Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards, the Corporation for National and Community Service is providing Americans with increased opportunity to acquire post-secondary education. Each year, approximately \$200 million are distributed to AmeriCorps alumni, making post-secondary education more affordable for young Americans.^[xxii] Since 1994, AmeriCorps alumni, who completed one or two terms of service, have earned \$2.2 billion to fund their education, repay student loans or make eligible interest payments. And CNCS has made \$55.4 million in interest forbearance, covering the interest costs of outstanding student loans for AmeriCorps members who complete their service term.^[xxiii]

As America struggles to regain its standing as the nation with the highest proportion of college graduates in the world, it is essential that the Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards continue to make post-secondary education more accessible for America's youth.

Conclusion

Our nation is slowly recovering from the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. In times of fiscal austerity and limited government, it is critical that citizens step up to serve. The nonprofit organizations that rely upon support from the Corporation for National and Community Service are giving citizens the opportunity to address our nation's most pressing challenges. While supporting their fellow Americans, these citizens are learning critical skills that will increase their employability and earning potential over the course of their professional careers. Without the Corporation for National and Community Service millions of Americans will be denied the opportunity to serve and will not gain essential workplace skills that will help them to overcome today's pervasive unemployment. Now, more than ever before, is the time to invest in the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Notes

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Voices for National Service

Voices for National Service is a diverse coalition of national service programs, state commissions, and individual champions committed to expanding opportunities for Americans of all ages to serve and volunteer. Founded in 2003, Voices for National Service has built strong bipartisan support among our nation's leaders and helped position national service as a viable policy solution to tackle unmet needs, expand opportunity, and leverage social capital. Voices for National Service has become the collective voice for the national service field, disseminating information to national service programs and sharing information on the impact and importance of service with our nation's leaders. Voices for National Service has earned a reputation as a highly effective coalition that excels at engaging champions on Capitol Hill and across the country. Drawing on the combined experience and knowledge of the service community, Voices for National Service played a key role in the development and passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, the largest expansion of national service in America since President Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression.

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