



# VOICES *for* NATIONAL SERVICE

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Utah Conservation Corps  
Volunteer Florida  
Volunteer Mississippi  
Youth Service America  
Youth Volunteer Corps  
9/11 Day of Service

October 12, 2017

Steve Holliday

Chair

Full Time Social Action Review

Department of Digital Culture Media and Sport

Dear Mr. Holliday,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute towards building the evidence bank for the Full Time Social Action Review. I have submitted my responses on behalf of Voices for National Service, a coalition of national and local service programs, state service commissions, and individual champions of service. We work to educate the nation's leaders on the impact of national service programs and to develop bipartisan support for the federal investment in national service initiatives.

If I can provide any additional information or serve as a resource in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me at [aconnolly@cityyear.org](mailto:aconnolly@cityyear.org) or 202-742-7370.

Sincerely,

AnnMaura Connolly

President, Voices for National Service

Chief Strategy Officer & Executive Vice President, City Year, Inc.

## Full Time Social Action Review: Collecting Evidence from International Stakeholders

### **How do you define full time social action, and can you give an example of how it has benefited young people, communities and government policy?**

In the United States, full time social action is called national service. Young people between the ages of 18 – 25 who choose to participate in national service are part of government funded program called AmeriCorps, which enables them to serve full-time for 10 months as they work to complete 1,700 hours of service. AmeriCorps members tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, assist veterans and military families, provide health services, run after-school programs, help communities respond to disasters, and build the capacity of nonprofit organizations. In exchange for a year of full-time service, members earn a small stipend to help cover living expenses and upon completion of their service, a \$5,920 education award that can be used for college or graduate school expenses, or to pay back qualified loans.

AmeriCorps is a unique federal program operated by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that has three branches: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps\*National Civilian Community Corps (AmeriCorps\*NCCC) and AmeriCorps\*VISTA. AmeriCorps State and National provides grants to hundreds of nonprofit organizations which in turn recruit, deploy and manage AmeriCorps members. Nonprofits that run AmeriCorps programs include Teach For America, City Year, Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross, state and local conservation corps and many other faith-based and community organizations. Seventy five percent of the funds awarded to nonprofits are distributed through a network of Governor-appointed state service commissions. The remaining one fourth is granted directly to national nonprofits. The nonprofits that receive funding from AmeriCorps are required to match the funding they receive with private contributions. Last year, the match-funding exceeded the federal contribution.

AmeriCorps\*NCCC is a residential program fully-funded and operated by CNCS that deploys young people from five regional campuses around the country for short and long-term assignments in disaster response, conservation and other needs identified by local communities. AmeriCorps\*VISTA places individual members in high-poverty communities to add capacity to nonprofit and faith-based organizations focused on poverty alleviation.

Since 1994, more than 1 million Americans have given 1.3 billion hours of service through AmeriCorps. In 2016, AmeriCorps programs leveraged \$1 billion worth of resources from other sources, and AmeriCorps members managed or mobilized 2.3 million community volunteers while serving at 21,600 sites.

In addition to AmeriCorps, the Corporation for National and Community Service also operates a variety of other domestic service initiatives including Foster Grandparents, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Senior Companions, the Volunteer Generation Fund and it oversees national days of service including 9/11 Day of Service and Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

There are many ways to evaluate the benefit of national service in the United States. A [report](#) by economists at Columbia University found a significant return on investment for national service programs: every dollar invested in national service generates almost \$4 in returns to society in terms of higher earnings, increased output, and other community-wide benefits. The initial benefit – services provided – leads to future benefits as participants build skills and move toward economic independence. National service is an investment in future prosperity.

National service/AmeriCorps is also moving the needle on widespread national challenges, such as the dropout crisis. City Year is one AmeriCorps program working to provide students with necessary supports to stay in school and on track to graduate. According to City Year's [2015-2016 Impact Highlights](#), a major national study found that schools that partner with Diplomas Now—a collaboration of City Year, Communities In Schools and Talent Development Secondary— significantly reduced the number of students at risk of dropping out, according to the research-based early warning indicators.

In one year or less, City Year helped drive: a 51% reduction in the number of students off track in English language arts and a 47% reduction in the number of students off track in math supporting school. There are wide school gains to partnering with City Year, according to research in 22 schools by Policy Studies Associates, schools that partnered with City Year were twice as likely to improve on state English assessments and up to three times more likely to improve proficiency rates in math. These schools gained the equivalent of approximately one month additional English and math learning, compared with schools that did not partner with City Year.

In addition to education, AmeriCorps programs are also working to address pressing national issues, including:

- **Disaster Services.** AmeriCorps partners with communities facing natural disasters to provide trained volunteers that can assist in feeding and shelter operations, home repairs, environmental cleanup, needs assessments, client casework, and long-term recovery. In response to the recent Hurricanes, CNCS has committed more than 2,000 national service members to support efforts in Texas, Florida, Georgia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. AmeriCorps members from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories have been called to communities impacted. These AmeriCorps members make up CNCS's elite, specialty-trained disaster response crews. Their service includes volunteer and donation management, disaster survivor assistance, operations and logistics, damage assessments, muck and gut operations, and AmeriCorps has been an integral part of large-scale disaster response and recovery in the wake of hurricanes, wild fires, and tornadoes. In response to Hurricane Sandy in New York and New Jersey, CNCS mobilized more than 180,000 hours of volunteer service valued at more than \$4 million. AmeriCorps has been instrumental to long term recovery for Hurricane Katrina. Over the past ten years, CNCS has invested \$333,055,500 in grant awards for Louisiana and Mississippi. Since the hurricane, 1,615 homes have been constructed, 13,782 homes have been refurbished for disaster victims, and 17,335 tons of debris and trash has been removed from the area.

- **Economic Opportunity.** AmeriCorps partners with national and local organizations that provide financial education, tax preparation services, consumer counseling, connection with community services or benefits, housing construction and repair, and links to job training and placement programs. In 22 years, more than 9,500 AmeriCorps members have worked with Habitat for Humanity to help give 26,000 U.S. families a place to call home. In addition, AmeriCorps programs have raised millions of dollars in donations and have engaged more than 3.5 million volunteers to help further its mission.
- **Environmental Stewardship.** AmeriCorps programs address a wide variety of environmental needs. More than 10,000 members are engaged in environmental service activities each year where members improve millions of acres of park land and conduct audits that focus on energy and water efficiency and renewable energy use. In 2013, AmeriCorps NCCC members planted more than 329,000 new trees across the country.
- **Combatting the Opioid Crisis.** AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members serve in nonprofits, faith-based, and community organizations working to expand the reach and impact of substance abuse education, prevention, and recovery efforts. They serve as recovery coaches, build capacity for anti-drug organizations, expand drug abuse education, promote the safe disposal of medication, conduct drug screenings and assessments, help prevent relapse and recidivism, and more. The \$10.5 million federal investment supports 1,200 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members in more than 150 communities across 45 states.
- **Veterans and Military Families.** AmeriCorps programs seek to provide services and support to veterans and military families. These services range from coordinating assistance for veterans to find employment, improve access to veteran benefits, and promote community-based efforts to meet the unique needs of military families.

**How do you encourage young people to get involved in volunteer programmes? Is this something your government is working to expand?**

There is a far greater demand for AmeriCorps positions than the government is currently able to provide. The average ratio of applications AmeriCorps programs receive for every available position is 5:1. For some AmeriCorps programs, the application to acceptance ratio can be 13:1 or higher. In addition, there are many more requests for funding from qualifying nonprofit organizations than there are available dollars.

Young people are encouraged to do a year of service to give back to their country while gaining valuable skills sets, earning a stipend, and gaining an education award to use towards loan repayment or future education. Since the program's founding in 1994, over **one million** AmeriCorps members have earned more than **\$3.3 billion** in education awards.

Another benefit of serving is the career opportunities it creates—eight out of ten alumni say AmeriCorps has benefitted their career path and 42% of alumni employed within six months of service found a job

through a connection made in AmeriCorps. More than 440 companies representing 2.3 million jobs including Accenture, Sodexo, CSX, Disney, and Delta Air Lines have signed up to be Employers of National Service, committing to hire more AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni because they value the leadership, skills, and work ethic AmeriCorps members acquire during their service.

There is long-standing bipartisan support for national service among our nation's leaders because they understand that national service is a viable policy solution to tackle unmet needs, expand opportunity, and leverage human capital. A recent [TargetPoint poll](#) found that 83% of voters would like to maintain or increase the federal investment in national service. Across party lines, voters are united in support for national service: 74% of voters agree that it helps replace government handouts with local, volunteer-based, community work and empower people to be more self-sufficient and less dependent on the government in the long run, 80% agree that it helps prepare young people for the workforce, 79% agree that it helps build stronger neighborhoods and communities, and 78% agree that it helps restore important values of patriotism and civic duty to young people.

### **What motivated the change of status for young people who wanted to do full time social action?**

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush created a commission to study the idea of national service. That commission provided demonstration grants to a handful of service programs, including City Year, YouthBuild and the California Conservation Corps, among others, and documented the outcomes and impact that resulted from that investment. President Clinton had long admired national service as a policy idea and made it one of the signature ideas of his campaign. An important component of this idea was the connection to helping to make university more affordable. After his election, President Clinton took the recommendations of the Commission and created a new federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service, which brought the various federally supported domestic service initiatives under one federal agency and launched AmeriCorps. The legislation creating AmeriCorps provided a special employment status called “participant.” Those who serve through AmeriCorps are provided with a living stipend, health insurance and a scholarship they can use to pay down student loans or pay for university. The stipend is paid on a bi-weekly basis to the AmeriCorps member. The scholarship is paid directly to the institution, either a university or loan company, not to the AmeriCorps member. The reason for the creation of the new category of employment status was two-fold. First, national service was envisioned as a short-term assignment, one to two years of service and sacrifice, not a strategy for getting long-term workers at a reduced pay rate. In fact, national service programs adhere to a strict non-displacement policy. Second, in order to expand national service, it was clear that the cost of the program needed to be scalable.

### **What legislation had to be changed to support full time volunteering amongst young people?**

The United States Congress has passed several comprehensive laws to establish and amend the national service infrastructure that supports full-time service among young people. The federal government has established grant programs administered at both the federal and state levels that provide assistance to organizations engaging young people in national service opportunities, and established a trust to facilitate the provision of education awards to individuals who complete a term of national service. Importantly,

the legislation that created the AmeriCorps program specified that a national service member “shall not be considered to be an employee of the organization receiving assistance under the national service laws through which the participant is engaging in service.” This legislative language effectively exempts national service programs from existing wage and labor laws, and permits national service programs to provide national service members with a fixed living allowance and education award in exchange for their full-time service.

### **How long did it take to get the correct legislative and regulatory framework in place?**

National service legislation -- and the resulting national service infrastructure in the United States -- has evolved over time. Some legislative initiatives have consolidated existing service-oriented programs, and others have expanded the scope of national service initiatives. A brief history of national service legislation in the United States can be found [here](#). With respect to the AmeriCorps program in particular, the National and Community Service Act of 1990 created a commission that administered small-scale national service demonstration grants before the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 formally established the AmeriCorps program and the Corporation for National and Community Service, the independent federal agency that administers AmeriCorps.

### **Did removing the barriers to full time social action increase the numbers of young people participating? If so, can you give examples of this?**

As the number of AmeriCorps positions funded by the federal government has expanded, dedicated and talented young people have been prepared and eager to serve. Approximately 85,000 AmeriCorps members are engaged in service each year and the demand for these positions far exceed the available supply, resulting in an AmeriCorps acceptance rate of 17%. Each year, millions of citizens are engaged in volunteering and the demand is only increasing for more full time opportunities for people to serve.

### **Are young people from poorer backgrounds participating? Despite the legislative change, are there still barriers for vulnerable young people?**

Recruiting for diversity is a significant focus for AmeriCorps, defining diversity broadly to be inclusive of income, race, ability, and experience. Diversity varies between programs. Specific programs, like YouthBuild, are focused on youth in urgent need of pathways to work and education to help break the cycle of poverty. YouthBuild engages low income 16-24 year olds who are neither in school nor employed (more commonly referred to as NEET in the UK). In December 2014, [YouthBuild reported](#) that its corps was 100% low income, and that 93% of members entered the program without a high school credential, 53% of members received public assistance, 67% were men, 31% were court-involved, and 29% were parents.

Other programs like City Year focus on racial and economic diversity, but require that corps members have graduated from high school and are prepared to serve in schools. In fact, over 80% of City Year AmeriCorps members have graduated from college. City Year tracks its corps' economic diversity through [Pell Grant](#) eligibility, which requires a total family income of \$50,000 or less, however, most Pell Grant

money goes to students with a family income below \$20,000. Over 47% of the City Year corps is Pell Grant eligible. In terms of racial diversity, the corps is 41% white, 24.8% African American, 19.1% Hispanic/Latino, 6.5% Asian, and 5.7% multi-racial.

In 2016, [The Corps Network](#), which leads and supports over 130 of America's Service and Conservation Corps, reported that of their more than 25,000 corps members, 53% were black, 21% were Hispanic.

### **What were the risks associated with removing existing barriers to full-time social action, and how have you overcome these?**

The demonstration grants supported by the [National and Community Service Act of 1990](#) provided an opportunity to learn about effective national service models and the role of the federal government in supporting these initiatives.

That pilot program led to the formal establishment of the AmeriCorps program three years later, and AmeriCorps has grown over time. Additionally, periodic reauthorizations of existing national service legislation allows for practical challenges that emerge from the implementation of the law to be addressed. Labor unions were consulted as the program was designed to ensure that there was widespread support for national service as a different concept than traditional labor.

### **How does the framework for youth volunteering compare with adult volunteering?**

AmeriCorps positions are most often full-time service opportunities that take place over a defined period of time. Senior Corps positions however, which are for adults aged 55 and over, are designed differently, and allow volunteers to serve over many years. Some Senior Corps programs provide a very modest hourly stipend to cover transportation and other costs associated with volunteering.

AmeriCorps is a powerful catalyst and force-multiplier for community volunteering. In 2015, AmeriCorps members recruited, trained, and supervised more than 2.3 million community volunteers for the organizations they serve.

Furthermore, there are extensive opportunities for episodic volunteering for adults through Points of Light and the United Way. The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that over 60 million Americans perform volunteer activities in their communities each year.

### **Useful Resources:**

[I Will Get Things Done for America: Celebrating 20 Years of AmeriCorps](#)

[Polling Data on National Service](#)

[The Economic Value of National Service](#)

[www.voices4service.org](http://www.voices4service.org)

[www.nationalservice.gov/](http://www.nationalservice.gov/)

For more information, please contact:

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