

National Service: A Resource for Governors



At a time of fiscal restraint and mounting social challenges, the nation's Governors have recognized the critical role that citizen service can play in solving community problems. Every day, millions of citizens make a difference in their states by increasing high school graduation rates, rebuilding communities struck by natural disasters, helping seniors live independently, mentoring at-risk youth, and more.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a close partner with the nation's Governors in expanding opportunities for citizens to have a positive impact in their communities. As the nation's largest grantmaker for service and volunteering, CNCS strengthens our nation's civic infrastructure and expands the reach and impact of volunteers in addressing pressing social problems. Last year CNCS engaged more than 5 million Americans in results-driven service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs.

National service recognizes that the best solutions come from outside Washington, D.C., where everyday people are finding ways to solve problems in their communities. By getting more individuals involved in fixing problems in their communities, over the long run we make our nation stronger and can reduce the reliance on government.

A Key Role for States: Your State Service Commission

National service is a model of devolution, pushing funding and decision-making to the state and local level. In creating the modern system of national service, Congress ensured that Governors would have a key role in determining how national service resources are used in states. Approximately two-thirds of AmeriCorps grant funding goes to Governor-appointed state commissions. These commissions determine social needs in their state, set policy and program priorities,

competitively award grants to local nonprofits and agencies, provide training and technical assistance, monitor grantees to ensure quality and compliance with federal and state law, and broadly promote service and volunteering in their states. For Governors looking for low-cost, high-impact strategies to meet their states needs, service commissions are a vital resource that can help Governors tap the power of citizens to solve problems and strengthen communities.

National Service in Action

Following are some examples of how Governors and their state service commissions are using national service to meet key needs in their states:

Supporting California's Veterans

Nearly 30,000 California veterans separate from military service each year, facing multiple challenges in readjusting to civilian life. Governor Schwarzenegger, working through California Volunteers and the California Department of Veterans Affairs, has launched Operation Welcome Home to help these veterans successfully re-enter civilian life. This year, the program will engage 80 AmeriCorps members to conduct outreach to recently returned veterans, connect them with jobs, housing, health care, and other services; coordinate with state agencies; and mobilize volunteers to support veterans.

Rebuilding Mississippi After Katrina

After Hurricane Katrina unleashed a wave of devastation across the Gulf Coast, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour and the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service recognized the key role volunteers and national service participants would play in the recovery effort. Five years later, more than 950,000 volunteers have been a part of rebuilding Mississippi, contributing more than 9.5 million hours of work totaling over \$143 million in service to Mississippi communities and residents. This large-scale volunteer response wouldn't have been possible without the support and leadership provided by thousands of AmeriCorps members serving in the state.

Raising Reading Levels in Minnesota

Half of Minnesota's children are not ready for kindergarten, one-fourth of third-graders are not reading at grade level, and one-third of students fail to graduate from high school. To address these challenges, Governor Tim Pawlenty's Serve Minnesota launched the Minnesota Reading Corps, a statewide initiative to help Minnesota children become successful readers. The program engages trained AmeriCorps members to serve as reading tutors for struggling learners. Today there are 550 AmeriCorps members working with 12,000 children, age three to grade three, in 286 sites across the state. Statewide, 74 percent of Reading Corps participants, all of whom were at significant risk for failure, passed Minnesota assessment tests, compared to the overall 78 percent pass rate for all Minnesota students.

Putting Michigan Youth on the Right Track

Understanding the critical role that mentors play in helping at-risk youth stay in school and avoid risky behavior, Governor Granholm and the Michigan Community Service Council launched Mentor Michigan, an initiative that supports nearly 250 organizations around the state that are changing lives by matching mentors with young people. Mentor Michigan provides those organizations with training and research; fosters partnerships; and builds public awareness about the need for mentors.

AmeriCorps-Intensive Service to Meet Community Needs

AmeriCorps provides opportunities for more than 85,000 Americans each year to give intensive service to their communities and country. AmeriCorps members tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, teach computer skills, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, help communities respond to disasters, and build the capacity of nonprofit groups to become self-sustaining, among many other activities.

AmeriCorps is a powerful catalyst and force-multiplier for community volunteering, mobilizing more than 2.4 million community volunteers for the organizations they serve. In exchange for a year of full-time service, members earn a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award equal to the Pell Grant that can be used to pay for college or graduate school, or to pay back qualified student loans. Since 1994, more than 634,000 Americans have given 774 million hours of service through AmeriCorps.

■ **AmeriCorps State and National:** As the largest branch of AmeriCorps, the state and national grants program provides financial support to public and non-

profit organizations that sponsor service programs around the country to recruit, train and place AmeriCorps members to meet critical community needs in education, health, economic opportunity, veterans affairs, disaster services, and the environment.

■ **AmeriCorps VISTA:** VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, and much more. VISTAs improve the ability of organizations to alleviate poverty by raising funds, recruiting community volunteers, and designing sustainable programs.

■ **AmeriCorps NCCC:** AmeriCorps NCCC is a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women ages 18-24. NCCC members are organized into teams of 10-12 members and serve in the region's local communities by responding to needs in the areas of disaster preparation, response and recovery; environmental conservation; public safety; urban and rural development; and, education.

Senior Corps: Making a Difference for Generations

Each year Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of nearly 500,000 Americans age 55 and older to meet a wide range of community challenges through three programs:

- The **Foster Grandparent Program** connects volunteers age 55 and over with children and young people with exceptional needs. Volunteers mentor, support, and help some of the most vulnerable children in the United States.
- The **Senior Companion Program** brings together volunteers age 55 and over with adults in their community

who have difficulty with the simple tasks of day-to-day living. Companions help their clients live independently in their own homes by assisting with shopping and light chores, interacting with doctors, or just making a friendly visit.

- **RSVP** connects volunteers age 55 and over with service opportunities in their communities that match their skills and availability. From building houses and tutoring children to conducting safety patrols and responding to disasters, RSVP volunteers put their unique talents to work to make a difference.

Learn and Serve America: Engaging Students in Community Solutions

Learn and Serve America strengthens communities, improves education, and instills an enduring ethic of service for more than one million students every year. The program provides funds to state education agencies, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education to develop, support, and sustain service-learning for young people. This approach - which inte-

grates community service with classroom learning - enriches academic achievement, promotes civic engagement, and improves the quality of life in communities. Most Learn and Serve America funding goes to state education agencies, which in turn make subgrants to local school districts. Other funds go directly to institutions of higher education.

Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund is a new way of doing business for the federal government that stands to yield greater impact on urgent national challenges. The Fund will target millions in public-private funds to expand effective solutions across three issue areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development and school support. This work will directly impact thousands of low-income families and create a catalog of proven approaches

that can be replicated in communities across the country. Funded at \$50 million in fiscal year 2010, the Social Innovation Fund leverages a 3:1 private-public match, sets a higher standard for evidence-based solutions, empowers communities to identify and drive solutions, and creates an incentive for grant making organizations to more effectively target funding to solutions that generate real impact.

Volunteer Generation Fund

The Volunteer Generation Fund, a new program authorized by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, is designed to increase the number and impact of volunteers solving problems in communities. On August 24, 2010, CNCS awarded its inaugural Volunteer Generation Fund grants totaling \$4 million to 19 U.S. state service commis-

sions. The grants will support state commissions to identify effective approaches to increase the number of volunteers, strengthen the capacity of volunteer connector organizations to recruit and retain volunteers, and develop strategies to effectively use volunteers to solve local problems.

Nonprofit Capacity Building Program

CNCS helps tens of thousands of nonprofit organizations extend their reach and impact by providing grants, volunteers, training, research, and other assistance. Building on this foundation, CNCS launched the Nonprofit Capacity Building Program in 2010. This program, authorized by

the Serve America Act, will increase the capacity of intermediary grantees to work with small and midsize nonprofits in communities facing resource hardship challenges to develop and implement performance management systems.

Other Resources for States

Beyond its program support, CNCS offers a variety of resources that can help Governors and states expand the scope and impact of volunteering by their residents.

Training and Technical Assistance

- The Resource Center provides training and technical assistance to national service programs and nonprofit organizations seeking to expand their volunteer capacity.
- The National Conference on Volunteering and Service is the premier annual gathering of leaders of the volunteering and national service world, providing training, best practices, and professional networking opportunities.

Research

CNCS conducts extensive research and policy analysis to cultivate knowledge and enhance the effectiveness of the agency's programs and the broader voluntary and service sector.

- *Volunteering in America* is the most comprehensive data on volunteering ever assembled, providing detailed information on volunteering trends and demographics in the U.S., all fifty states, and more than 150 major cities.
- *Civic Life in America* features national statistics, findings, and trends on central themes of civic life, including service, participating in a group, connecting to information and current events, social connectedness, and political action.

For More Information

For more information contact:
Rhoda Glickman, Director
Office of Government Relations
(202) 606-6731
rglickman@cns.gov

- Each year, CNCS produces *National Service State Profiles* that list all CNCS funding and projects for Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America in every state.

Days of Service

- The Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service, taking place the third Monday of every January, supports community organizations in their efforts to engage local citizens in service on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday.
- The 9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance encourages Americans to remember the heroes and victims of 9/11 by honoring their memory through acts of community service.

Recognition

- The President's Volunteer Service Award promotes volunteer service by recognizing individuals, families, and groups for completing a certain number of volunteer hours. More than 28,000 certifying organizations have bestowed more than 1.5 million awards to the Nation's deserving volunteers since 2003.
- The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll honors colleges and universities for the commitment of their students, faculty, and staff to community service.

Kim Allman
Deputy Director for Intergovernmental Affairs
Office of Government Relations
(202) 606-6707
kallman@cns.gov

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