Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service grant funding is used to mobilize more Americans to observe the Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday as a day of service in communities, to encourage those who serve on this holiday to make a long-term commitment to community service, and to bring people together to focus on service to others.

The competition prioritized grant-making in programs addressing one or more of the six CNCS Focus Areas: Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families.

CNCS also gave priority consideration to organizations that included in their program disability inclusion plans to ensure people with disabilities were among those serving at their Martin Luther King Day of Service event.