



## Leveraging National Service at the Department of Labor: Opportunities for Workforce Development, Apprenticeship, and Career Pathways During and Post-Service

National service plays an important role in the country's workforce development ecosystem, offering long-term training and career on-ramps in high need industries for emerging and transitioning professionals. By committing to a year of service, corps members can gain substantial exposure to an area of work or career path before committing to it, build the technical skills necessary to complete the job, and develop the employability skills that contribute to fostering leadership skills, engaging meaningfully with members of a community, and forging civic and cultural attitudes that align with being an engaged participant in a healthy democracy. Particularly given major hiring needs in public service, health, education, climate resilience and clean energy areas, national service programs are well-suited to serve as an entrypoint for people into these professions.

The Department of Labor has the opportunity to better leverage national service through its workforce development programs. Though the primary outcomes of national service have long been the impact corps members can have in communities, national service programs in recent years have come to place a similar value on the impact that national service can have on corps members themselves. Though not a new phenomenon — the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s famously focused on outcomes in both conservation and on the employment of the nation's young men — programs across the country are revisiting their programming models with the professional development of their corps members in mind.

Strategically developing young people who are well-suited for the economy with the technical and employability skills they need to succeed is essential to the nation's future, and national service is a powerful tool to accomplish this goal. Developing those skills alongside a service-oriented mindset will develop a generation of life-long civic leaders who are well-positioned to be active members of the workforce, including in organized labor.

Moreover, national service is a cost-efficient bipartisan tool with a demonstrated return on investment that can be utilized to meet federal agencies' needs across the government. To learn more about Service Year Alliance's broader recommendations for a whole-of-government

approach to better leverage national service across federal partners, please visit our past publication, [Reimagining National Service: A Roadmap to the Service Presidency](#).

The Department of Labor has the opportunity to harness the power of national service in several ways. This menu of options is intended to build off of one another:

- Create New Programs and Expand Existing Successful Models using National Service  
Developing new programs that leverage partnerships between local workforce agencies and national service programs can help address existing and emerging economic and social needs. Some programs are very successfully integrating pre-apprenticeship models into their programming, which could be expanded across the Department of Labor. Similarly, YouthBuild programs, which often braid AmeriCorps and DOL funding streams, could be expanded.
- Add National Service to WIOA Placement Guidelines  
Currently, WIOA funding does not include national service programs as post-engagement placement opportunities. Including national service would foster more collaboration across workforce development and national service programs, resulting in lower youth disconnection and increased alternative strategies to talent development among younger generations.
- Strengthen Workforce Pathways for Underrepresented Groups  
Working with AmeriCorps to identify limitations and implementation practices has the power to increase the engagement of underrepresented populations in national service and the workforce. Specifically, while our nation has made some advances in increasing workforce opportunities for historically marginalized/underrepresented populations, more work is needed to include Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ populations, and people with disabilities. While each population requires unique strategies to appropriately support, many overlap, and collaboration with AmeriCorps will broadly drive equitable practices expeditiously.
- Expanding Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship within National Service  
DOL can help expand the role of national service in workforce development systems and can promote and facilitate national service programs to better weave pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship articulation into their program design. Some programs are already using these apprenticeship pipelines and tools successfully, but DOL could help to increase their footprint across the national service ecosystem.

### Create New Programs and Expand Existing Successful Models using National Service

There are many programs and place-based initiatives currently working to create and implement national service programs that intentionally help corps members build the necessary skills to enter high-need sectors of the workforce. In 2019, Service Year Alliance released [Service Years as a Strategy to Develop Talent Pipelines](#), a guide that shares the work of highly effective programs and elevates strategies that have demonstrated their potential. This work has continued with place-based efforts to connect service year programs with workforce development agencies at the state and local levels to offer intentional pathways into high-need careers in localities.

Working with AmeriCorps, DOL has an opportunity to build upon already existing initiatives, like YouthBuild and other programs, and forge new ones that pair their efforts to create an inclusive, equitable, service-oriented workforce that meets the needs of communities while ensuring young people have the 21st century skills they need to succeed in today's workforce. With guidance and support from AmeriCorps, DOL can develop service year projects that develop skills aligned with local labor markets for residents who face barriers to employment. The experience and skills these corps members gain would help them secure future employment in in-demand, growing industries identified by the local and regional workforce boards and entities.

National service is already used to create talent pipelines on a smaller scale into a number of industries like health care, emergency management, green energy, education, housing, and nonprofit management. National service does not displace jobs in any of these sectors. Instead, it allows young people intentional career on-ramps, while serving their community. National service can serve as a 'grow-your-own' talent strategy to foster and retain talent within a community, a growing trend in the education sector and one that can be applied to other industries.

### Add National Service to WIOA Placement Guidelines

Currently, WIOA funding does not include national service programs as post-engagement job placement opportunities, which would recognize the value of the paid work-based learning that occurs within service year programs. Including national service would foster more collaboration across workforce development and national service programs, resulting in lower youth disconnection and increased alternative strategies to talent development among younger generations. For more on how WIOA reauthorization could better strengthen and leverage national service, please see Service Year Alliance's [full recommendations](#) published jointly with America's Service Commissions.

### Strengthen Workforce Pathways for Underrepresented Groups

We recommend working with AmeriCorps to identify limitations and implementation practices that will increase the engagement of underrepresented populations in national service and the workforce. Specifically, while our nation has made some advances in increasing opportunities for historically marginalized/underserved populations, more work is needed to include Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ populations, and people with disabilities. Though each population requires unique strategies, many overlap, and collaboration with AmeriCorps will broadly drive equitable practices expeditiously.

National service itself is an opportunity to make a variety of sectors more demographically diverse. In a recent poll conducted by Service Year Alliance and Change Research, 60% of young people of color between the ages of 18 and 28 indicated that they would be interested in participating in a national service program. Offering diverse groups on-ramps into industries within which underrepresentation is a significant challenge could catalyze significant change in a variety of industries.

#### *Improve AmeriCorps Disability Policy*

Ensuring that AmeriCorps programming is accessible to all people regardless of disability is also critical. AmeriCorps currently has a fund to help refund programs that provide accommodations to corps members with disabilities, thereby enabling them to serve. Funds, however, are distributed as reimbursements, making it difficult for many programs that run on tight budgets to participate. Laying out the costs in advance in hopes of reimbursement is a significant burden. With guidance from DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), AmeriCorps can improve the processes in which it supports programs' accommodations for people with disabilities to truly make service an opportunity for all.

#### Expanding Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship within National Service

The Department of Labor can play a critical role in expanding the role of national service in workforce development and can help promote and facilitate national service programs to better weave pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship articulation into their program design. In partnership with AmeriCorps, DOL could convene workforce development stakeholders — employers, unions, workforce boards, workforce development experts, communities — to assess what industries might best be served by the creation of pre-apprenticeships through national service and help determine the kinds of skills or certifications necessary to successfully put young people on a path to these careers. DOL could also offer technical assistance to programs looking to infuse pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship agreements into their model. National service can play a helpful role to drive underrepresented young people into apprenticeship opportunities, and with better coordination, investment, and policy support, DOL can help AmeriCorps programs to accomplish that goal. Service Year Alliance, in partnership with Jobs for the Future and Next100, will be publishing a white paper for programs on this topic in June 2023.

## Spotlight: Local Programs Leveraging Workforce Development Best Practices

National service programs across the country are harnessing workforce development tools to better equip their corps members for the workforce, including fostering strong employer partnerships for post-service pathways, training and credentialing opportunities aligned to local industry needs, and incorporation of pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships into the service year experience. Outlined below is a snapshot of several successful programs utilizing these best practices.

Greencorps Chicago works directly with diverse partners to incorporate the latest relevant knowledge and skills in the fields of ecological restoration, green infrastructure, landscaping, and tree care. Most notable are their partnerships with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) and the Chicago Park District; both offer opportunities for corps members to work alongside district staff to learn industry standards, and participate in joint training that leads to industry certificates and credentialing. These partnerships are valuable because they offer direct connections to their contractors for future employment opportunities. Their partnerships afford Greencorps Chicago the opportunity to understand industry-related needs in order to make modifications to their program model each year.

Youthbuild's Health Corps has a training curriculum that is informed by local employment partners. While this is an emerging part of their program, American Youthworks Health Corps has found these partnerships particularly valuable in ensuring corps members are prepared for entry-level positions in the healthcare industry. One of their promising partnerships is with a local senior living facility, Westminster Clinical. Through this partnership, corps members complete their hands-on training and service hours at Westminster Clinical, with additional training provided in partnership with Austin Community College. American Youthworks has received direct feedback on how to incorporate industry standards both during training and in post-service year opportunities.

Green City Force utilizes the Roots of Success Eco-literacy curriculum and introduces corps members to a comprehensive green living system, which teaches about sustainability and the symbiotic relationships to the natural world, environmental injustices, and ways to live green. Corps members receive technical training and support to obtain the Urban Green Council's GPRO Green Professional Building Skills and OSHA 10 certificates. A subset of the corps members receive further training such as hands-on electrical, carpentry, OSHA 30 and the Building Performance Institute certificate. These trainings prepare Green City Force's graduates for various jobs in the green building sector such as energy auditors, solar installers, maintenance, and construction workers.

Mile High Youth Corps' Energy & Water Conservation Program engages 18-24 year olds to provide free in-home energy and water audits and upgrades to low-income residents in Colorado. Corps members, working on small team-based crews, provide one-on-one client

education and coaching for water and energy conservation improvements and act as a community resource agent when visiting households. While serving, corps members earn industry-recognized certificates such as the Roots of Success Pre-Apprenticeship Environmental Specialist Certificate and the Building Performance Institute's Building Science Principles certificate — both of which expose corps members to multiple post-service pathways and apprenticeship opportunities. Mile High Youth Corps also provides corps members with robust wraparound support services to mitigate barriers to success such as childcare, housing, and transportation.