



Frequently Asked Questions for Policymakers

What is a service year?

A service year is a paid opportunity to develop real-world skills through hands-on service. This life-changing experience is a chance to impact the lives of others and drive change in communities.

What is the role of the federal government in supporting service years?

All sectors - government, philanthropic, and business - have roles to play in supporting service years. Strong support for national service programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild from the federal government helps match that from other sectors. Federal support is especially important when using service years to address national priorities with evidence-based programs; offering extra support in order to give opportunity youth the chance to serve; and supporting grassroots solutions to local challenges in high-poverty areas.

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Types of Service Year Programs

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, part of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), is a set of programs that utilizes national service in order to “get things done.” In fact, “I will get things done for America” is a part of the pledge all AmeriCorps members recite as they are sworn-in. AmeriCorps programs include:

- AmeriCorps Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) - a program that engages full-time corps members in building the capacity of organizations working to reduce poverty in the US.
- AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) - a full-time residential program for young adult corps members that is nimble and well-positioned to respond to urgent needs, such as natural disasters, around the country.
- AmeriCorps State and National - a program that makes grants to pay a share of the cost of full-time and part-time programs operated by national and local nonprofits and public agencies to meet unmet local needs by deploying corps members to serve in local communities. These programs combine public and private resources to support corps members whose service addresses education, environment, health, and other human needs.
- The National Service Trust - provides Segal AmeriCorps education awards to corps members who successfully complete service with VISTA, NCCC, State and National, or approved programs that do not receive grant funds from CNCS. Education awards can be used toward higher education tuition or student loan repayment.

These programs were authorized at different times by Congress, but work in conjunction with one another to make up the AmeriCorps we know today. The latest reauthorization of AmeriCorps is the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, which updated the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

The Peace Corps

Through the Peace Corps, President John F. Kennedy sought to involve Americans more actively in the cause of global democracy, peace, development, and freedom. Over the last half century, Peace Corps volunteers have played a hand in many noteworthy international accomplishments, including helping Baltic nations transition out of communist control to a capitalist system, providing girls in developing countries the chance to learn, wiping out malaria in Africa, and helping people around the developing world to grow small businesses that can make them self-sufficient.

YouthBuild

In over 250 YouthBuild settings across the country, low-income young adults who left school without a diploma return to earn their degree, learn job skills, transform their lives, get back on track to adult responsibility, and give back to their communities. Each year about 10,000 youth ages 16-24 enroll full-time in locally run YouthBuild recovery schools for about 10 months. They spend 50% of their time back in the classroom, and 40% in hands-on job training building affordable housing or other community assets for families in their own communities. Although many are ex-offenders, formerly homeless, or were gang involved, by working hard in a safe and caring community of adults and peers committed to each other’s success, these young people become self-reliant citizens. Some YouthBuild programs receive funding from the Department of Labor.

¹Voices for National Service/TargetPoint Consulting Memo, December, 2015, updated December, 2016

²Service Year Qualitative Research Report,” and “Service Year Quantitative Research Report,” Penn Schoen Berland, July 2015.

³Voices for National Service Presidential Battleground Poll,” Voices for National Service and TargetPoint Consulting, October 2015.

[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/servicenation/pages/911/attachments/original/1447190383/TargetPoint_National_Service_Battleground_State_Survey_\(1\).pdf?1447190](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/servicenation/pages/911/attachments/original/1447190383/TargetPoint_National_Service_Battleground_State_Survey_(1).pdf?1447190)

⁴Data from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

⁵https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS_Solving_Problems_and_Expanding_Opportunity_0.pdf

Do Americans support service years?

Overall Voter Support for Service Years¹

- 80 percent of voters would like to maintain or increase the federal investment in national service, including 78 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 90 percent of Democrats.
- 67 percent of voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who releases a plan to place an AmeriCorps member in every low-performing school in America.
- 61 percent of voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who would guarantee funding to establish a service position for every qualified national service applicant.

Support for the Service Year Experience²

- 88 percent of Americans believe that national service can teach young people the importance of discipline and hard work.
- 84 percent of Americans believe that national service can teach young people how to help communities prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters.
- 84 percent of Americans believe that national service can teach young people to understand the importance of helping others and giving back.

Support for National Service Addressing Issues³

- Over 90 percent of voters support service in the following areas to address challenges facing our country:
- Mentoring or tutoring students in lower performing schools
- Assisting military families and veterans who are adjusting back into civilian life
- Cleaning up rivers, parks, and blighted public areas
- Helping communities prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters
- Providing job training skills to boost economic opportunities for low-income Americans

Are service years cost-effective?

- Every federal dollar invested in AmeriCorps is matched by more than two dollars from donations and in-kind support from non-CNCS sources, including business and philanthropy.⁴
- In 2015, CNCS generated \$1.26 billion in outside resources from private businesses, foundations, and other sources – an amount exceeding the federal appropriation.⁵
- For every one dollar the federal government invests in service years, there is a nearly four dollar return on investment.⁶
- Federal agencies can utilize service year corps members to perform duties that align with agency missions at a low cost, like FEMA Corps, which is estimated to save \$60 million annually.
- States and local communities can utilize corps members to address local challenges or crises and to revitalize and rebuild communities.

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²Service Year Qualitative Research Report," and "Service Year Quantitative Research Report," Penn Schoen Berland, July 2015.

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⁴Data from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

⁵https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS_Solving_Problems_and_Expanding_Opportunity_0.pdf

⁶Source: The Economic Value of National Service," Clive Belfield. Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education Teachers College, Columbia University, September 2

Do service years lead to careers?

- Service years help put opportunity youth – the nearly 5 million young people who are neither in school nor working – on a path toward education or a career. Some service year programs enable opportunity youth to earn their diploma or GED while serving simultaneously, and others act as workforce development tool for opportunity youth by giving them valuable on-the-job training in skills that are connected with career pathways.
- Service years help young people better define their career pathways and assist them in moving to the next step. Forty-three percent of AmeriCorps alumni state that their service year was aligned with their career path, and 79 percent say that their service year was a defining professional experience.⁷
- Service years help young people develop into leaders, problem solvers, and more active citizens. Nine out of ten AmeriCorps alumni reported that their service year experience improved their ability to solve problems. Additionally, eight of out ten alums that if they were confronted with a community issue, they could confidently develop a plan to address it and get others to care. In addition, 94 percent of alumni are registered to vote, well above the national average.⁸
- Service years are a powerful workforce development tool that have the power to lead to careers by providing young people with tangible skills – especially career-specific skills for self-management and interacting with others.⁹

Do employers value and hire young people who do a service year?

- Service years are backed by over 450 “Employers of National Service” who highly value the skills individuals gain during their service and bring to the workplace.
- On average, nine out of ten AmeriCorps alumni agreed or strongly agreed that they could solve difficult problems, persist when opposed, accomplish goals, handle unexpected events and unforeseen situations, remain calm, cope with difficulties, and identify multiple solutions. Alumni rated their current skills as higher than at pre-service, with the greatest gains being in their abilities to deal with unexpected events and unforeseen situations.¹⁰
- A recent LinkedIn survey of hiring managers revealed that 59 percent believe that these highly valued soft skills are difficult to find.¹¹

How do service years impact higher education and civic engagement?

- Service years done through AmeriCorps help pay for higher education by providing access to education awards that can be used to pay for college tuition or to pay down student loan debt. To date, AmeriCorps alums have earned more than \$3.3 billion to help with college costs. More than \$1 billion of scholarship funds have gone to repay students loans.¹³
- Individuals who complete a service year with AmeriCorps reported high levels of civic engagement and civic self-efficacy, and indicated that their AmeriCorps experience influenced their civic engagement.¹⁴

⁷http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_CNCS_Alumni%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report.pdf

⁸<https://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/new-report-ameri-corps-service-leaves-lasting-impression-alumni-improves>

⁹http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_CNCS_Alumni%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report.pdf

¹⁰http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_CNCS_Alumni%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report.pdf

¹¹<https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/trends-and-research/2016/most-in-demand-soft-skills>

¹²https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS_Solving_Problems_and_Expanding_Opportunity_0.pdf

¹³https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS_Solving_Problems_and_Expanding_Opportunity_0.pdf

¹⁴http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_CNCS_Alumni%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report.pdf