

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NATIONAL SERVICE

When faced with challenges, our nation has always relied on the dedication and action of its citizens. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) carries on a long tradition of citizen involvement by providing opportunities for Americans of all ages to improve their communities through service.

The Civilian Conservation Corps

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. Four million young people joined in response to his call to service, restoring the nation's parks, revitalizing the economy, and supporting their families and themselves. For 11 years the Civilian Conservation Corps provided billions of dollars in services and enabled millions of families to live in dignity.

The GI Bill

During the 1940's, the GI Bill linked wartime service to educational benefits, offering returning World War II veterans the opportunity to pursue higher education in partial compensation for service to their country. Veterans improved their own lives by attending college. They also contributed mightily to America's future. With the education they received, those citizens helped spark the economic boom that helped make America the world's leading economy.

Peace Corps

In the 1960s the call to service came from President John F. Kennedy, who challenged Americans in his inaugural address "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." In response to this challenge, the Peace Corps was born. The Peace Corps continues to engage thousands of volunteers who travel the world far and wide, building schools where none existed, helping farmers provide food for the hungry, and creating hospitals to care for the sick. After returning from overseas, Peace Corps volunteers put their new knowledge of others to work at home, in the spirit of citizenship, changing America for the better.

The War on Poverty

President Lyndon B. Johnson brought the spirit of the Peace Corps home to America by creating Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in 1964. VISTA, which is now part of AmeriCorps, continues to fund programs under the sponsorship of local public agencies or nonprofit organizations to improve the condition of people living in under-served, low-income communities throughout America. Other initiatives such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Corps (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program were developed in order to engage older Americans in the work of improving the nation.

Youth Service Movement

In 1970, Congress created the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a summer environmental employment program for youth ages 15-18. In 1978, a Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) became part of CETA, but was eliminated in 1982 by the Job Training Partnership Act

(JTPA) which did not include national service programming. Some components of YCC and YACC remained active in several states, funded through public and private dollars, and in 1976, California became the first state to create its own youth conservation program, the California Conservation Corps. Youth Conservation Corps still operates on a limited basis in some national parks and wildlife refuges. Private funders helped create additional youth corps programs during the seventies, including the Youth Volunteer Corps of America, City Year, and YouthBuild. Associations such as Youth Service America (YSA) and the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) were formed to work with the various youth service movements. Youth service programming grew on college campuses, sponsored by such national programs as the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) and Campus Compact.

Revival of Interest National and Community Service

President George H. W. Bush helped spark a revival of interest in national service when he instituted the White House Office of National Service in 1989. In 1990 Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which created a Commission on National and Community Service sought to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States.” Full implementation began in 1992, when the commission awarded \$64 million in grants to support four broad types of state and local community service efforts. These initiatives were the Serve-America programs (now Learn and Serve) which involved school-aged youth in community service and service-learning through a variety of school and community-based activities; Higher Education Innovative Projects aimed at involving college students in community service and at promoting community service at educational institutions; American Conservation and Youth Service Corps, supporting summer and year-round youth corps initiatives that engage both in- and out-of-school youth in community service work; and the National and Community Service Demonstration Models, for programs that were potential models for large-scale national service. The National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), a demonstration program to explore the possibility of using post-Cold War military resources to help solve problems here at home, was enacted later as part of the 1993 Defense Authorization Act. It is a residential service program modeled on the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States military.

National and Community Service Trust Act

President Bill Clinton sponsored the National and Community Service Trust Act, a revision of the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which was passed by a bipartisan coalition of Members of Congress and signed into law on September 21, 1993. The legislation created a new federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), to administer federally-funded national service programs. The law created AmeriCorps, which was designed to support local, state, and national organizations across the nation that involve Americans in results-driven community service. Individual AmeriCorps participants, known as members, typically serve for a year, during which they receive a living allowance. After service, members receive an education award, administered by the National Service Trust, and paid as a voucher redeemable for current education costs at colleges, universities, other post-secondary institutions, and approved school-to-work programs, or to pay back qualified student loans already incurred. The legislation drew on the principles of both the Civilian Conservation Corps and the GI Bill, encouraging Americans to serve and rewarding those who do. The new agency also took over the programs of two previous agencies, ACTION, which was responsible for running VISTA and the

National Senior Service Corps programs, and the more recent Commission on National and Community Service, including the NCCC, forming a new network of national service programs under AmeriCorps.

Service in the New Millennium

In his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush called on all Americans to serve their country for the equivalent of two years and announced the creation of the USA Freedom Corps, an umbrella network for volunteerism. A coordinating council housed at the White House and chaired by the President, is working to expand and strengthen federal service programs like the Peace Corps, Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps, and to raise awareness of and break down barriers to service opportunities with all federal government agencies. Several bills have been introduced in Congress over the past three years to increase funding for national service and to reauthorize the National and Community Service Act.

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS

CNCS provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and the nation through three programs: AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America. Members and volunteers serve with national and community nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and local agencies to help meet pressing community needs. CNCS is part of USA Freedom Corps, the White House initiative to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility, and help all Americans answer the President’s Call to Service. CNCS fosters civic responsibility, strengthens the ties that bind us together as a people, and provides educational opportunity for those who make a substantial commitment to service.

Each year, CNCS also sets forth specific goals, such as recent ones to increase volunteer generation, to make funding more accessible to small community and faith-based organizations, and to increase civic engagement. Occasionally, CNCS will fund special initiatives, such as the Overcoming the Digital Divide and America Reads programs in order to meet pressing national needs.

AmeriCorps

This program, sometimes referred to as “the domestic Peace Corps,” is the national service program that engages Americans of all ages and backgrounds in results-driven service in the five priority areas of education, public safety, environment, homeland security, and other human needs. AmeriCorps programs provide full and part-time opportunities for members to provide service to their communities through community organizations and agencies. Over 250,000 people have served in AmeriCorps since the program was founded ten years ago.

Within AmeriCorps, there are three major goal areas:

Needs and Service Activities	AmeriCorps programs provide a variety of specific and identifiable services that address community needs. This may involve direct service or capacity building activities that provide a direct benefit to communities.
Participant Development	AmeriCorps expands opportunities, helping those who help AmeriCorps. Because of their AmeriCorps service, members develop additional skills, gain valuable experience, and receive education awards that can be used for post-secondary education or to repay student loans. To help ensure that members are prepared for and benefit from their service, programs provide members skills and leadership training.
Strengthening Communities	AmeriCorps strengthens communities by involving citizens directly in serving community needs. AmeriCorps members help bring individuals and groups from different backgrounds together to cooperate in achieving constructive change and to solve critical community problems.

AmeriCorps*State and National Direct

AmeriCorps*State and National members participate in local service programs operated by community based nonprofit organizations, local and state government entities, Indian tribes, territories, institutions of higher education, local school and police districts, and partnerships among any of the above. Members serving in these programs help meet communities' critical education, public safety, environment, homeland security, and other human needs.

Approximately three-quarters of AmeriCorps grant funding goes to state commissions appointed by governors, which in turn distribute and monitor grants to local organizations and agencies in response to local needs. These programs are called AmeriCorps*State programs. They are funded either through a formula allotment granted to each state or through a competitive process wherein programs compete for funding against other programs throughout the nation. The other quarter of AmeriCorps funding is granted by the CNCS through a competitive grants process to national nonprofit organizations operating programs in more than one state. These programs are called AmeriCorps*National Direct. Program recruitment, selection, placement of members, and supervision are the responsibility of the grantees. Within AmeriCorps*State and National, there are also Tribes and Territories programs, Education Awards programs, and other special initiatives.

AmeriCorps*VISTA

AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve low-income communities and families across the country. Members of AmeriCorps*VISTA work and live in the communities they serve, creating or expanding programs that continue after they complete their terms of service.

AmeriCorps*VISTA members are assigned to local project sponsors and focus on building community capacity, mobilizing community resources, and increasing self-reliance. VISTA project host sites are selected by the State Offices of CNCS, with the approval of each state's governor.

AmeriCorps*NCCC

AmeriCorps*NCCC is a 10-month residential national service program for more than 1,200 members ages 18 to 24. Based on a military model, it sends members in teams of 10 to 14 to help nonprofit groups provide disaster relief, preserve the environment, build homes for low-income families, tutor children, and meet other challenges. AmeriCorps*NCCC teams meet community needs in cooperation with non-profit programs, state and local agencies, and other community groups. Members live at one of five regional campuses located in Charleston, South Carolina, Denver, Colorado, Perry Point, Maryland, Sacramento, California, and Washington, D.C., though their projects often take them to other communities throughout their region. Members are trained in CPR, first aid, and mass care and can be assigned to new duties on short notice, they are particularly well-suited to meeting the emerging homeland security needs of the nation.

National Senior Service Corps

The National Senior Service Corps, also known informally as "Senior Corps," taps the skills, talents, and experience of more than 500,000 Americans age 55 or 60 and older to meet a wide range of community challenges through three programs: Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP. These programs receive funding through annual appropriations and are

selected by CNCS State Offices on a non-competitive basis. In addition, National Senior Service Corps programs may compete nationally for funding as Programs of National Significance.

The Foster Grandparent Program (FGP)

Foster Grandparents serve as mentors, tutors, and caregivers for at-risk children and youth with special needs through a variety of community organizations, including schools, hospitals, drug treatment facilities, correctional institutions, and Head Start and day-care centers. In fiscal year 2001 more than 30,000 Foster Grandparents tended to the needs of 275,000 young children and teenagers. Local nonprofit organizations and public agencies receive grants to sponsor and operate local Foster Grandparent projects. The Foster Grandparent Program is open to people age 60 and over with limited incomes. Organizations that address the needs of abused and neglected children, troubled teens, young mothers, premature infants, and children with physical disabilities work with the local Foster Grandparent program to place and coordinate the services of the Foster Grandparent volunteers. Local partners (called volunteer stations) include children's services agencies, child and youth-oriented charities, and faith-based institutions.

The Senior Companion Program (SCP)

Senior Companions serve one-on-one with the frail elderly and other homebound persons who have difficulty completing everyday tasks. They assist with grocery shopping, bill paying, and transportation to medical appointments, and they alert doctors and family members to potential problems. Senior Companions also provide short periods of relief to primary caregivers. Because of the program, thousands of citizens are able to live with dignity in their own homes. SCP is open to healthy individuals age 60 and over with limited incomes. In fiscal year 2001, 15,500 Senior Companions tended to the needs of more than 61,000 adult clients. Local nonprofit organizations and public agencies receive grants to sponsor and operate Senior Companion projects. Community organizations that address the health needs of older persons work with local SCP projects to place and coordinate the services of the SCP volunteers. These local partners (volunteer stations) include hospitals, area agencies on aging, and home health groups. The stations' professional staff identify individuals who need assistance and work with SCP projects to place them with Senior Companions.

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)

RSVP volunteers serve in a diverse range of nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and faith-based groups. RSVP is open to people age 55 and over. Among other activities, RSVP volunteers mentor at-risk youth, organize neighborhood watch programs, test drinking water for contaminants, teach English to immigrants, and lend their business skills to community groups that provide critical social services. In fiscal year 2001, approximately 480,000 volunteers served an average of four hours a week at an estimated 65,000 local organizations. Local organizations, both public and private, receive grants to sponsor and operate RSVP projects in their community. These projects recruit seniors to serve from a few hours a month to almost full-time, though the average commitment is four hours a week. Most volunteers are paired with local community and faith-based organizations that are already helping to meet community needs.

Learn and Serve America

Learn and Serve America provides grants to schools, colleges, and nonprofit groups to support efforts to engage nearly one million students from kindergarten through college students in community service linked to academic achievement and the development of civic skills. This type of learning, called service-learning, improves communities while preparing young people for a lifetime of responsible citizenship. Learn and Serve grants are used to create new programs or replicate existing programs, as well as to provide training and development to staff, faculty, and volunteers. CNCS funds state education agencies, state commissions on national and community service, nonprofit organizations, Indian tribes, and U.S. territories, which then select and fund local service-learning programs through Learn and Serve K-12. Institutions of higher education and consortia are funded directly through Learn and Serve Higher Education.