



A CHALLENGE TO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES: MAKE A YEAR OF SERVICE A COMMON OPPORTUNITY

Now more than ever, America needs citizens of all backgrounds who are willing to come together and tackle the many problems facing our communities. We can start by offering every young American the opportunity to complete a service year, which will help solve today's challenges and prepare tomorrow's leaders.

A service year is a substantial, sustained, full-time commitment that is supported with a modest living allowance and other benefits. It is organized to have a real, measurable community impact while making a lasting difference in the lives of those who serve.

Today, there are approximately 65,000 full-time service year opportunities, including national service positions that receive federal funding through AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild – programs where corps members help students in low-income schools succeed, preserve national parks, fight poverty, and rebuild neighborhoods in the wake of natural disasters.

Through their service, many service year corps members gain a pathway to college or a first job, and develop essential workplace and leadership skills that will strengthen our nation for decades to come.

To help realize the potential of young Americans and unleash a powerful force for good, the next President should:

- Restore national service as a national priority by putting America on the path to making a service year a common opportunity and cultural expectation, starting by dramatically increasing the number of full-time service positions through the three successful federal civilian national service programs—AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, and YouthBuild—and asking every federal agency to create a service year corps to tackle important challenges cost-effectively.

- Establish service year opportunities as a pathway to higher education and careers by increasing education awards and loan forgiveness for those who serve, making those education awards tax-free, creating incentives for higher education institutions to recognize and reward service years, and recruiting service year alumni into federal jobs.
- Encourage states, communities, and nonprofit organizations to create service year positions to solve locally identified problems by partnering with the Service Year Exchange, a new private sector technology platform designed to connect individuals who want to serve with certified publicly and privately funded service year positions.

Service year opportunities have a bipartisan presidential and congressional legacy, enjoy overwhelming support from American voters of all party affiliations, are sought by young adults, and represent a proven strategy that can tackle pressing challenges while saving taxpayer dollars in the process.

Increasing these service year opportunities would help unify the country and become a living legacy of the next president. We challenge the presidential candidates to pledge to make service year opportunities a cultural expectation and common opportunity for young Americans of all backgrounds.



SERVICE + YEARSM

Why Support Service Years?

AMERICANS WANT TO GIVE BACK

- **Voters overwhelmingly support investing in service year opportunities.** 83% of voters in presidential battleground states want to maintain or increase the federal investment in national service.ⁱ
- **Service year opportunities are in high demand among American students.** Multiple polls of Millennials have found one in four would definitely serve. One recent poll found this number increases to 50% when including those who may be very interested, and jumps to 80% when including those who are somewhat interested.ⁱⁱ

SERVICE YEARS ARE A COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTION TO PUBLIC PROBLEMS

- **Every federal dollar invested in national service generates returns to society of \$3.95** in terms of higher earnings, increased output, and other community benefits.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Service year opportunities invest in prevention, saving taxpayer dollars.** Through prevention and early intervention practices, service years minimize the high costs of social challenges down the road.^{iv}
- **Service year opportunities are typically managed locally.** Neighborhood, community, and faith-based institutions direct bottom-up, citizen-led strategies, not top-down government solutions.

SERVICE YEAR EXPERIENCES PREPARE YOUNG AMERICANS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS FOR COLLEGE, WORK, AND PUBLIC PURPOSE LEADERSHIP

- **Service year opportunities can make higher education more affordable.** AmeriCorps members are rewarded with an education award equal to a Pell Grant that can defray the burden of mounting student loan debt.
- **Service year opportunities prepare young Americans for the workforce and help them find jobs.** Unemployed Americans who volunteer are 27% more likely to secure full-time employment.^v
- **Service year opportunities re-engage opportunity youth.** Many service year programs have established evidence of success in providing an on-ramp for opportunity youth (who are disconnected from both school and jobs) from service to education and employment.^{vi}
- **Service year opportunities unite Americans by fostering connectedness and understanding.** Nine out of ten AmeriCorps alumni express confidence in interacting with diverse people and respecting others' values. Eight in ten Returned Peace Corps Volunteers reported their service was effective in helping to promote a better understanding of other peoples by Americans and 93% said the Peace Corps helped to improve the perception of the United States globally.^{vii}

ⁱ TargetPoint Consulting. (2015). *Republicans and democrats overwhelmingly support national service*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/VoicesPoll>

ⁱⁱ Roll Global for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute (2014). "National Service Survey of Millennials." See also Civic Enterprises with Hart Research (2013). "Voters for National Service: Perspectives of American Voters on Large-Scale National Service," An Executive Brief for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute, retrieved from https://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/pubs/Voters_for_Service_Brief.pdf; and Penn Schoen Berland (July 2015), "Service Year Qualitative Research Report," and "Service Year Quantitative Research Report."

ⁱⁱⁱ Belfield, C. (2013). *The economic value of national service*. New York, NY: Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education. Retrieved from http://voicesforservice.org/resources/Sep19_Econ_Value_National_Service.pdf

^{iv} Corporation for National and Community Service. (2013). *Volunteering as a pathway to employment*. Washington, DC: Office of Research and Evaluation, Corporation for National and Community Service. Retrieved from http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/vol_emp_executivesummary.pdf

Service Year Program Examples

Leading nonprofit organizations are leveraging service years to expand their work, innovate and achieve results. Examples of service year programs include:

City Year, which mobilizes teams of diverse AmeriCorps members who provide full-time high-impact student, classroom and school-wide support to help students stay in school and on track to graduate from high school, ready for college and career success

College Possible, which enhances college readiness and completion among first-generation, low-income college students

The Corps Network, which unites more than 100 organizations that work on conservation, infrastructure improvement, and human service projects identified by communities and on public lands and national parks

FEMA Corps, which mobilizes a special force of AmeriCorps*National Civilian Community Corps focused on disaster preparedness, response and recovery

FoodCorps, which combats rampant obesity and diabetes by engaging full-time AmeriCorps members who teach young students to make life-long, healthy food choices

Global Health Corps, which selects young professionals for year-long fellowships with organizations promoting health equity in East Africa, Southern Africa and the United States

Habitat for Humanity, which uses AmeriCorps members to organize teams of volunteers to build housing for low-income families and communities affected by natural disasters

Jesuit Volunteer Corps, which offers young adults an opportunity to serve full-time for a year at nonprofit organizations working in and with poor and marginalized communities

The Mission Continues, which reintegrates veterans into their home communities

AmeriCorps*National Civilian Community Corps, a residential team-based program that engages 18-24 year olds in service projects focused on disaster response, infrastructure improvement, environmental stewardship, conservation, and urban and rural development

Peace Corps, which sends volunteers overseas for two years of full-time service focused on social and economic development in developing countries

Playworks, which places full-time, year-round coaches in elementary schools to enhance and transform recess and play into a positive experience that supports learning and student success

Teach For America, which recruits recent college graduates to teach and affect change in under-resourced urban and rural public schools

AmeriCorps*VISTA, which places volunteers in low-income communities to support community efforts to overcome poverty

YouthBuild, which teaches low-income young people construction skills and engages them in building affordable housing and other community assets such as community centers and schools

^v Cardazone, G., Farrar, A., Frazier, R., Gabbard, S., Hernandez, T., Houston, S., La Taillade, J., Lovegrove, P., Pratt, D., Vicinanza, N., & Willey, J. (2015). *AmeriCorps alumni outcomes: summary report*. Burlingame, CA: JBS International. Retrieved from http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_CNCS_Alumni%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report.pdf

^{vi} Voices for National Service. (2012). *National service: cost-effectively delivering critical services to Americans in need*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://voicesforservice.org/resources/CriticalServicesReport.pdf>

^{vii} White House Council on Community Solutions. (2012). *Final report: community solutions for opportunity youth*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.serve.gov/sites/default/files/ctools/12_0604whccs_finalreport.pdf

Presidential Challenge Signatories

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