

Memorandum

To: Interested Parties

From: Michael Meyers, TargetPoint Consulting

Date: December 11, 2015
Updated: December 16, 2016

Re: Congress Should Prioritize Funding for Our National Service Programs

POST-ELECTION UPDATE:

Overwhelming Support for National Service Programs Remains Consistent Through a Year of Change Americans Want a Renewed Commitment to National Service Programs

Heading into the 2016 election cycle, we highlighted for policymakers the strong support for National Service programs in presidential battleground states. We reported to you one year ago that “74% of all presidential battleground state voters, including 66% of Republican voters support National Service projects on a broad basis. Following this incredible year of change and turbulence, we felt taking a fresh, national pulse on support for National Service was appropriate.

Our December survey of over 1,300 registered voters across the country, clearly demonstrates that support for National Service programs is stronger than ever.

After being given the basic facts about National Service programs **80% of voters agree that we should continue federal investment in the programs.** This includes women, African Americans, Hispanics, Independent voters, Millennials, and Democratic constituencies. 74% of Republicans and Trump Supporters agree with continued federal investment in National Service programs.

When we asked specifically if voters would support a robust National Service program proposed by President Trump, an overwhelming 87% of Republicans and 88% of Trump supporters support this program.

We encourage President Trump, and congressional leadership to take a closer look at National Service programs including AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps. These programs have been historically supported by presidents of both political parties including George H.W. Bush, President Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and President Obama. Republicans and Democrats could work together in a bipartisan way to make funding for our National Service programs a priority item in their agendas and taking more full ownership of these popular and cost-effective programs that offer multiple benefits, including providing pathways to jobs and putting citizens at the center of solving the problems facing their communities.

We have outlined the results and messaging from our earlier research in the remainder of the memo. We would welcome the opportunity to provide your team with a more detailed review of this data and answer any questions you may have. To schedule a time for briefing, either in person or remotely, please contact Michael Meyers at mmeyers@targetpointconsulting.com

Challenge: Finding an Issue with Base and National Appeal

National Service is, at its foundation, built on giving back to our community and our nation. National Service programs, including AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, engage citizens in solving problems in local communities with matching support from private and other sources.

A wide range of National Service programs help members to develop their skill sets and prepare young people for work, while other programs focus on more experienced citizens, helping to enrich their lives, allowing them to stay active in their communities and provide vital community based services. National Service programs tackle local and national challenges, all while instilling a sense of duty and patriotism in its members and the lives they touch. A report released by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which oversees the federal investment in AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, found that unemployed individuals who volunteer are 27 percent more likely to secure employment than those who do not volunteer.

A study by economists at Columbia University found that for every dollar invested in National Service programs, there is a \$3.95 return to society in terms of higher earnings, increased output and other community-wide benefits.

CNCS grantees have to match each federal dollar with private sector, philanthropic or foundation funds. It is especially important to keep in mind that National Service programs are managed locally by neighborhood, community and faith-based institutions that lead bottom-up citizen-led strategies, not top down government solutions. Additionally, at a time when we are struggling to find answers to the challenge of college student debt, National Service programs like AmeriCorps reward responsibility with an earned post-service education scholarship.

Promoting National Service programs and the values they represent can bridge the divides between partisan groups after the 2016 election. Most of us have seen our National Service programs at work locally in our states, in our schools and churches, and have met with strong supporters of these programs. In addition to these wonderful anecdotes, we want to provide you some hard numbers to consider as well.

Looking at the Numbers

TargetPoint was commissioned by Voices for National Service to conduct a survey in the key presidential battleground states of Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. In these states we conducted 800 interviews with registered voters from October 3-5. The survey looked to measure initial support for National Service as a concept as well as specific National Service programs including AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and FEMA Corps, and whether or not voters felt National Service programs were good investments of taxpayer dollars.

Key Findings from the Survey

- A strong majority of voters, including a majority of Republicans, support federal investment in National Service programs.
- Even the most conservative voting groups do not want to see funding cut from these programs.
- Supporting National Service and making funding those programs part of the agenda can improve image and favorability after the election.
- Key general election voting blocs, including conservative leaning Republicans, are extremely responsive to messaging about the benefits that National Service provides locally and nationally.

We asked respondents their opinion on funding National Service programs at three different intervals throughout the survey and saw an increase in support for funding National Service at each different interval. Beyond our overall support seen from voters in each of our states surveyed, we also saw very few voters across the spectrum who were interested in cutting all funding for National Service programs. Only 14% of Tea Party supporters want to cut all funding for National Service programs, with many demographic groups reaching near unanimity that we should maintain or increase spending and investment in National service programs.

Initial Ballot Test: 66% agree that a federal investment of tax dollars in support of National Service is a worthwhile investment.

Informed Ballot Test: 79% agree that a federal investment of tax dollars in support of National Service is a worthwhile investment.

Funding Preference: 83% would like to maintain or increase the levels of spending and investment, (39% think increasing spending would be best, while 44% think maintaining current levels of spending would be best).

Presidential battleground voters agree with the potential benefits and impact these programs have and the values they instill in both service members and the communities they serve in. At least 68% of all presidential battleground voters are more likely to support National Service programs after hearing each of the benefits. The following were the most popular messages with our voters.

Top Three Most Popular Messages Overall

- “These programs act as an important two-way bridge for our veterans returning home from service. More than 1.5 million veterans and their families have received help from program members and more than 17 thousand veterans have continued their service to the country as national service members themselves.” (80% more likely to support National Service programs, 60% much more likely)
- “Some National Service members have partnered with organizations like the Red Cross to help the nation prepare, respond, and recover from natural and man-made disasters. National Service members have responded to a full range of disasters including floods, hurricanes, forest fires and tornados and provided especially vital and innovative services following Super Storm Sandy.” (85% more likely to support National Service programs, 50% much more likely)
- “National service members develop needed professional skills that make them more competitive when applying for jobs. By gaining valuable experiences, they enter the workforce as better trained, better educated and more valuable employees.” (83% more likely to support National Service programs, 45% much more likely)

Conclusions

This is the time to not just consider, but make actionable, support and funding of National Service programs as part of any bipartisan issue agenda. National Service is a rare concept that unites Americans, with remarkable potential implications for the bipartisanship, and irrefutable benefits to our country.
