

SUPPORT NATIONAL SERVICE

Over the last few years, studies and polls have documented significant support for national service broadly speaking and support for the idea of young people doing a service year. In a 2013 [Voters for National Service](#) poll, American voters had a generally positive view of national service with a broad understanding of what the term means.¹ 61% of those surveyed reacted favorably to the term and support increased as education level increased.

A recent study carried out by Penn Schoen Berland (PSB) for Service Year Alliance also indicates support for young people doing a service year.² The study shows support for the concept due to the tangible benefits of the experience like skills gained, new experiences, and professional development. According to the quantitative portion of the PSB study, broad consensus exists that a service year can better prepare young people for a successful future, either after high school, favored by youth (ages 14-17) and their parents, or during or after college, favored by millennials.

Voters for National Service polling also shows Americans believe that the country and national service participants would benefit greatly—and in a variety of ways—from a national service program. Voters recognize that national service can help address many of the challenges currently facing our country and community.

- The findings show that support was high for service in a wide range of areas: Assist military families and veterans who are adjusting back into civilian life (93%); Mentor or tutor students in lower performing schools to help keep them on track and graduate (91%); Help communities prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters (91%); Clean up rivers, parks, and blighted public areas (91%); and Provide job training skills and career advice to boost economic opportunities for low income Americans (90%).
- With regard to younger Americans, voters feel that participating in national service taught them a number of valuable lessons. Foremost among these are understanding the importance of discipline and hard work (88%), understanding the importance of helping others and giving back (84%), and learning how to collaborate and work as a team (84%).

A more recent study this election season, [Voices for National Service Presidential Battleground Poll](#) confirms the high level support for national service. The study took place across nine battleground states and indicates voters say they are more likely to support candidates with national service plans.³

- 67% of voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who comes out with a plan to place an AmeriCorps member in every low-performing school in America.
- 61% 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 Funding of National Service

In addition to general support for national service, the recent polling in the Voices for National Service poll suggests that this isn't just theoretical support, as Americans also back federal spending on national service programs. In October, the Wall Street Journal highlighted some of these recent findings in its article, ["Poll: Americans Back Federal Spending on National Service Programs."](#) The polling finds that 83% of voters would like to maintain or increase the federal investment in national service. This finding includes 78% of Republicans, 84% of Independents, and 90% of Democrats.

- In addition, 24% of Republicans, 39% of Independents, and 57% of Democrats support an increase in spending for national service.
- Only 9% of voters, including only 14% of Tea Party supporters, would support cutting all federal funding for national service.

The earlier 2013 study for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute also shows support for government spending on national service with more than three in four respondents indicating that increased funding for national service would be worth it. The strong demand for opportunities to serve influences voters' support for increased funding. When told that more than 600,000 Americans apply to programs such as AmeriCorps and Peace Corps, but more than 80% (half a million) are turned away each year because there are not enough available positions:

- 76% of voters say increasing public funding to enable more Americans to serve in a civilian national service program would be worth it, including 93% of Democrats, 74% of Independents, and 60% of Republicans.
- Some of the strongest support for increasing funding for civilian national service came from Latino voters, with 91% saying an increase is worth it.

The PSB study also asked participants about support for funding of national service. At least half of each audience indicate increased government funding for a service year programs is *probably or definitely worth it*, with the biggest benefit being a better citizenry.

- The findings also show that participants in the study would like to see more funding come from colleges and universities.

Interest in Participating in National Service

The 2013 study for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute also shows that voters express real interest in participating in national service programs. While many age groups, demographics, and political parties show interest, younger Americans are most interested in participating in full-time national service.

- When asked how interested they would be in participating in a voluntary national service program in the future, nearly half (48%) of respondents say they would be very or somewhat interested. Among voters ages 18 to 39, interest in participating increases to 53%.

In a separate survey for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute focusing only on millennials conducted by Roll Global, findings show support for millennials' willingness to participate in national service.⁴ Of those surveyed, 24% said they would definitely be willing to participate. This number increases to 50% when including those who may be very interested, and jumps to 80% when including those who are somewhat interested.

- 24% would definitely participate
- 31% very likely to participate
- 34% somewhat likely to participate
- 12% not very likely/definitely would not participate

The Roll Global survey of millennials also indicates that millennials want to "feel good about the work" that they do, want to "gain experience in the real world" and use service as a way to position themselves for great "job opportunities" in the future. Financial reasons such as the need for an income or the desire to include a unique life experience on their resumes were the prevailing reasons for wanting to serve.

- Millennials do express some concerns about participating in national service, including: lack of time, low pay, not fitting in with interests or career goals, etc.
- The PSB study found that youth & millennials are attracted to national service due to the benefits to the community and encouraging their own personal growth. For parents in the study, tangible benefits to the participants and personal growth for the participants were the most compelling arguments for participating in a service year.

It is also worth noting that there may be positive national service contagion effects, in that those who serve can influence their peers. The polling found that:

- 94% of 18-22 and 93% of 23-28 year olds are likely to recommend a national service program to someone else.
- 74% of respondents to the Voters for National Service survey said they would be "much more" or "somewhat more" likely to favor a national service program if they heard about it from a former participant.

Support for Different Types of National Service

Voters appear to support a range of different types of service options. The Voices for National Service polling indicates that 87% of voters support Senior Corps and 80% support AmeriCorps, a model where members commit to up to one year of civilian service in return for a living allowance and an educational scholarship.

- The polling also shows high levels of support for different types of national service programs: that serve veterans (89%), respond to disasters (85%), help young people develop professional skills that make them more competitive when applying for jobs (83%), and offer a post-service college scholarship to make higher education more accessible.
- The Roll Global survey of millennials finds that they are most interested in serving in the realm of education and animal welfare, but 84% of millennials were interested in more than one issue area.

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¹ "Voters for National Service: Perspectives of American Voters on Large-Scale National Service," An Executive Brief for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute by Civic Enterprises with Hart Research, March 2013. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/pubs/Voters_for_Service_Brief.pdf

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

³ "Voices 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?1447190383](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/servicenation/pages/911/attachments/original/1447190383/TargetPoint_National_Service_Battleground_State_Survey_(1).pdf?1447190383). The poll included 800 registered voters. They were representative of nine presidential battleground states: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

⁴ "National Service Survey of Millennials," Roll Global for the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute, 2014.