



**Public Opinion Research  
Commissioned by  
Voices for National Service  
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## MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties  
From: Michael Meyers, TargetPoint Consulting  
Date: February 28, 2020  
Re: Voices for National Service – Survey and Focus Group Findings

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In late 2019, TargetPoint Consulting conducted focus groups in Houston, Texas and Flint, Michigan. These groups were comprised of Republican primary voters, Democratic primary voters, and swing voters. The focus groups were then used to inform a national survey that was conducted January 23-24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and was comprised of 1,100 nationally representative interviews that included an over sample of likely Democrat and Republican primary voters.

### Key Findings

#### **Support for continued and expanded federal investment is universal and nearly unanimous.**

Voters want to see continued and expanded federal investment in civilian national service programs like AmeriCorps, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions. Nearly four out of five voters want the federal investment maintained or increased, including an overwhelming majority of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats. **Support for continued or expanded funding reaches 82% as voters learn more about specific national service programs.**

#### **National service messages and mission move voters.**

Messaging focused on engaging veterans in civilian national service opportunities, the role of national service in helping communities respond to disasters, and programs that deploy national service members to support students academically are overwhelmingly supported by the public. After hearing these messages, more than 80% of Americans say that these are good reasons to support national service programs and more than half of Americans find these messages very motivating. **These levels of support and responsiveness are essentially unheard of in today's policy debates.**

#### **There is strong support for expanding national service.**

Proposals to place AmeriCorps members in every low-performing school and to provide funding to allow all qualified applicants to serve are very popular among voters and would make voters more likely to support a Presidential candidate who supported these plans. More than two-thirds of all voters would be *more likely* to support a Presidential candidate who supported these and roughly one-third would be *much more likely* to support.

## **General Levels of Support**

Nationally, 78% of voters support investing their federal tax dollars in AmeriCorps and Senior Corps when read the following question:

National service programs are service opportunities supported by the federal government. The U.S. military is one type of national service program. Programs like AmeriCorps, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions are national service programs for civilians. These programs bring people of all ages and backgrounds together, provide them opportunities to serve their country for a sustained period of time, while they try to solve our nation's most pressing problems. Knowing this, do you support or oppose the use of federal tax dollars in support of civilian national service programs like AmeriCorps, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions.

This includes 71% of likely GOP primary voters and 85% of likely Democratic primary voters.

When given the following details on funding, 79% of Americans responded in support of increasing or maintaining funding for national service programs:

In the United States, we spend 8.5% of the federal budget on education and almost 60% for Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Federal spending on national service programs like AmeriCorps and Foster Grandparents is less than one quarter of one percent of the federal budget. Do you think that we should be INCREASING our funding for civilian national service programs, MAINTAINING current funding levels, DECREASING current funding levels, or ELIMINATING the funding for domestic national service programs entirely?

Nationally, 41% of voters support increased funding for AmeriCorps and Senior Corps and another 48% want funding levels maintained. This includes:

- 52% of likely Democratic primary voters want funding increased and an additional 34% want funding maintained.
- 23% of likely Republican primary voters want funding levels increased and an additional 48% want current levels maintained. Only 6% of likely Republican primary voters would like to see funding eliminated.

## *The Best Messages*

We tested a total of ten messages built around the core missions and operation of national service programs. Nine of those messages met traditional messaging criteria for effective use for targeted communications – meaning that each gained strong support reactions from at least 35% of all voters. Four of the messages met an even higher criteria with 45% registering a strong reaction indicating effective use as a broadcast message and three messages garnered strong support from majorities of all voters – a very high bar in today’s climate. Those three messages were:

1. Civilian national service programs provide important transition opportunities for soldiers returning home from service. They help integrate veterans back into our communities, by offering them a new mission, closer to home. (58% *much more* supportive; 87% total more supportive)
2. When natural disasters strike, national service programs are often leaders in the clean-up efforts. They respond to the needs of communities hit hardest so that they may rebuild their homes as well as their lives. (53% *much more* supportive; 86% total more supportive)
3. Young children and teenagers all over the nation receive academic support and encouragement from members of national service programs such as AmeriCorps and Foster Grandparents. This support leads to substantial improvements in attendance, behavior, academic performance and higher high school graduation rates. (51% *much more* supportive; 83% total more supportive)

These measurements reflect overall popularity of messages about national service. When we examine these messages for which are most likely to persuade someone to be more supportive of national service, the following three stand out:

1. Young children and teenagers all over the nation receive academic support and encouragement from members of national service programs such as AmeriCorps and Foster Grandparents. This support leads to substantial improvements in attendance, behavior, academic performance and higher high school graduation rates.
2. National service helps give people the opportunity to give back to their communities and restore a sense of duty for young people.
3. By providing opportunities to work toward a common goal alongside people that come from different backgrounds and have different viewpoints, these programs can help bring communities together.

## **Impact of messaging**

After messaging, we see support for increased funding rise among all groups. Nationally, 82% of voters want funding for civilian national service programs like AmeriCorps and Senior Corps to be increased or maintained. This includes 78% of likely GOP primary voters and 88% of likely Democratic primary voters.

Nationally, 47% want to see increased funding --a 6-percentage point or 15% increase-- from 41% of the initial response levels. Support for increasing federal funding for national service among likely GOP primary voters grew by 9-percentage points or 39%, from 23% support to 32%. Democrats support for increased funding grew by 8-percentage points or 15% from initial response of 52% to 60%.

## **National service policy proposals and the 2020 Presidential candidates**

Proposals to place AmeriCorps members in more schools and to provide funding to allow every qualified applicant to serve are very popular among voters and would make seven out of ten voters more likely to support a Presidential candidate who proposed these plans.

Democratic primary voters are very supportive of a candidate who would propose these plans, with 43% saying they would be *much more likely* to support a candidate who had a plan to put AmeriCorps members in every low-performing school and 42% saying that they would be *much more likely* to support a candidate who had a plan to make funding available so that every qualified applicant who wanted to serve in a domestic national service program would be given the opportunity.

Republicans are more supportive of the idea of placing AmeriCorps members in low-performing schools – 62% said this made them *more likely* to support a candidate who proposed this plan compared to 54% who said having guaranteed funding for every qualified applicant made them *more likely* to support a candidate with this plan.

## **Conclusions**

The focus groups and poll found that the public values national service more than ever and support for proposals to expand national service opportunities and funding is nearly universal. Americans – regardless of party affiliation – respond positively to messages about national service, which suggests this is an issue that can unite us.