



# Imagining America

## Making National Service a National Priority

TASK FORCE ON NATIONAL SERVICE

Sponsored by the  
American Jewish Committee

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## **This We Believe: A Statement on National Service**

Imagine an America where the most commonly asked question of a young person turning eighteen is not “Where are you going to work?” or “Where are you going to college?” but instead “Where are you going to serve?”

Imagine an America where each generation is given the opportunity to be the “Greatest Generation,” because it has participated in a common cause larger than itself.

Imagine an America where Americans from all backgrounds feel a common bond because each has had the opportunity to experience service to our nation—service that will make America stronger, more secure, and better for us all.

To fulfill our national promise to ourselves and to the world, we must find innovative ways to meet our continuing challenges, among them:

- Strengthening our infrastructure and homeland security
- Ensuring access to quality education for our young people
- Providing effective public safety and disaster relief
- Meeting healthcare and human service needs for all ages
- Protecting our environment and natural resources
- Securing adequate shelter for those in need

Overcoming these challenges is of paramount importance to our national security and prosperity. Yet agencies, organizations, and institutions involved in addressing these concerns require more labor than they can hire, more talent than they can mobilize, and more financial support than they can muster.

**We believe** that meeting critical social needs, encouraging civic engagement, and connecting people of different backgrounds with one another can be achieved through voluntary national service.

**We believe** that at least one year of full-time, intensive service, either military or civilian, should be the standard, not the exception. Additionally, sufficient financial and other assistance must be provided to attract large-scale participation by people between the ages of 18 and 25, who are at the beginning of their adult lives and have the ability to contribute at a sustained high level.

**We believe** that, by enhancing the civic consciousness of young Americans, such service will help build a stronger civil society characterized by understanding, respect, and lifelong engagement.

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## Executive Summary

### Key Findings

- The outpouring of goodwill and compassion after September 11, Hurricane Katrina, and other recent national crises reflects a trend toward volunteering and public service, which is at a thirty-year high in the United States.
- Right now there is broad-based popular recognition of the value of serving one's country. According to one poll, 73 percent of adults in this country believe that it is important to participate in national service. This presents a unique opportunity that we urge both Republicans and Democrats to seize, specifically by making a commitment to civilian national service part of their party platforms.

- The current support for the idea of national service presents a unique opportunity for us to marshal one of our greatest national resources, our young adults, to meet some of our most pressing social and civic challenges, by making it possible for any eligible American aged 18 to 25 to dedicate her or himself to national service for one year.
- Widespread youth service of this sort would not only help us improve our infrastructure and community services, it would also offer us a chance to strengthen our national fabric by engaging the members of an age group that has been identified as one of our most disaffected and disengaged.
- To ensure the success of a national service movement, government must work with foundations, businesses, and other institutions in both the public and private sectors to produce a range of resources that would make it feasible for young adults from all backgrounds to participate.

### **National Service in America**

- Volunteer service in America has a long and distinguished history ranging from community barn-raising and volunteer fire departments to national programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps.
- National service has repeatedly captured the imagination of leaders from both political parties over the course of the nation's history. In recent decades the idea of service has been widely embraced by schools and universities and has taken root in corporate culture.
- There are several valuable service programs already in existence, including AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps, but these programs receive more applicants than they can take, and they are not always able to provide the financial and other types of assistance to draw young adults from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities.

### **Why National Service?**

- A national commitment to voluntary service would link the rights and privileges of being American with a clear sense of responsibility, engendering habits of civic engagement that last a lifetime.
- Service programs strengthen our social fabric by broadening horizons and encouraging cross-cultural and ethnic relationships and understanding. In one study, former service-program participants were found to vote and volunteer more frequently than their peers, and to join more civic organizations and community groups.
- Service programs fulfill needs that remain unmet by government, nonprofits or the private sector, and, in cooperation with communities, provide valuable services that would otherwise not be available to those who receive them.
- In addition to providing these social benefits, service participation benefits the individual servers, improving their skills, opportunities, and outcomes later in life.

### **Recommendations**

To help engage all Americans in the effort to meet unmet societal needs, and to encourage and promote long-term civic engagement, we envision a national service initiative that is:

- Designed for young adults 18 to 25
- Voluntary but universally available to members of the target age group
- Immersive in nature, requiring a commitment of at least one year
- Structured to engage at least one million participants per year
- Supportive enough to be a viable option for all
- A multisector endeavor



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PEACE CORPS

## I. Introduction

Imagine an America where the most commonly asked question of a young person turning eighteen is not “Where are you going to work?” or “Where are you going to college?” but instead “Where are you going to serve?”

Imagine an America where each generation is given the opportunity to be the “Greatest Generation,” because it has participated in a common cause larger than itself.

Imagine an America where Americans from all backgrounds feel a common bond because each has had the opportunity to experience service to our nation—service that will make America stronger, more secure, and better for us all.

**Americans are ready, willing and able to serve their country.**

**It’s time to give them the chance.**

Since the turn of the millennium, national and world events have exposed an untapped national desire to help others and a drive

to concerted action that recalls the storied grit and determination of the nation’s earliest days. We saw families welcome strangers from New Orleans into their homes by the score; skilled workers take leaves of absence from their jobs or spend their vacation time volunteering at Ground Zero in New York; regular folks simply loading up their cars and driving clear across the country to deliver supplies to those in need.

The responses of so many Americans to the ravages of terrorism and natural disasters reflect a deeper national trend. A report issued in December 2006 by the Corporation for National and Community Service, which oversees the major federal civilian service programs, found volunteering in general to be at a thirty-year high in the United States. A Harris Poll conducted in January of this year found that nearly three in four (73 percent) American adults agree that it is important for young people to serve their country, and 55 percent support increasing the federal budget to allow everyone who is qualified and wants to serve in a full-time service program to do so. Support for national service is consistent across generations as well as between genders, and remains strong across political party lines.

This intersection of public interest and public opinion presents an opportunity to expand our commitment to national service. And when one looks at the bigger picture, one finds even more compelling reasons to do so.

According to a Corporation for National and Community Service report, the growth in volunteering has been driven primarily by three age groups: older teenagers ages 16 to 19; midlife adults ages 45 to 64; and adults 65 and older. Missing from the picture is a demographic that is one of our greatest national assets—and perhaps our greatest point of vulnerability as well.

Young adults in America are at a crucial junction in their lives. They are actively engaged in setting their goals and priorities and laying the groundwork for their futures. They are making important choices every day, and those choices are strongly guided by the paths and options to which they have been exposed.

We believe that the current generation of 18–25-year-olds does not have to follow in the footsteps of the notoriously disaffected Generation X. A large-scale national service initiative would provide an opportunity to reach these young men and women at a critical moment in their personal development, and to reweave this crucial demographic group into the social fabric.

There are, of course, many who serve our nation most nobly through the armed forces, and our focus here on civilian service is in no way meant to minimize their brave and selfless contribution. Yet only a small fraction of the more than 30 million 18–25-year-olds in this country choose to serve in the military, and all around us we see crucial needs that could be met by a domestic corps of young Americans. Such volunteers could help improve and repair our infrastructure. They could perform support roles in education, health care, and other vital areas, freeing up teachers and other skilled workers to tackle more complex tasks. They could help improve our national strength and resilience by teaching communities how to prepare for, and react to, natural disasters or terrorist attacks. And they could also be deployed to respond to urgent and emerging needs, as were the thousands of volunteers who helped repair the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina.

Such a corps would be an invaluable asset to a nation in which agencies, organizations, and institutions involved in addressing concerns such as those mentioned above require more labor than they can hire, more talent than they can mobilize, and more financial support than they can muster. In addition, we believe that a year of immersive volunteer service would help restore a shared sense of national pride and “ownership” that would strengthen the fabric of our ever more diverse society. Today many Americans behave like corporate shareholders, who have a financial stake in the national business as taxpayers, and who share the opportunity to cast a vote for its leadership, but who have no involvement in, and feel no sense of responsibility for, the day-to-day operations of the company. Indeed, many of them are entirely unaware that this was not always so: Each year millions of Americans enjoy our national parks, but

how many realize that the trails they hike and the roads they drive were built with the labor of young Americans, supplied by the country’s first major federal domestic-service program, the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Bringing a significantly greater number of young people into service to their nation may actually be easier than it sounds: Part of the drop-off in civic involvement seen among young adults may simply be due to lack of viable opportunities. In *New Thinking for the Future: Developing Models to Scale up National Service*, written shortly after AmeriCorps’ tenth anniversary, Susan Stroud, founder and executive director of the nonprofit social-change organization Innovations in Civic Participation and a member of this task force, pointed out that “demand for positions in programs such as AmeriCorps continues to outweigh supply, signaling that many young people who want to participate in an intensive service experience and earn money for higher education or training are frequently unable to do so.”

In addition, some research suggests that the generation of Americans born in the last two decades of the twentieth century is more predisposed than its immediate predecessor to engage civically. In *American Freshmen: Forty-Year Trends 1966–2006*, a report by the Higher Education Research Institute, released by UCLA this past April that documents the values and characteristics of college freshmen nationwide, researchers found that among students entering college in 2006, “the importance of helping others” was the third most strongly held value—the highest it has been in twenty years. In *Millennials Rising, The Next Great Generation*, Neil Howe and William Strauss depict a cohort of young people hungry for an opportunity to contribute. Americans born between 1982 and 2002, they say, “have a solid chance to become America’s next great generation.” Howe and Strauss report that a “new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds.” What better cohort of young people to enlist in a widespread service program?

The danger is that we will miss this opportunity.

Certainly, there are also obstacles to be overcome. According to “Generation Next: How Young People View Their Lives, Futures and Politics,” a study released in January by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, 40 percent of 18-to-25-year-olds surveyed still lived with their parents. Only 15 percent of these young adults were married, but 27 percent already had children to support. Among those still in school, 18 percent also worked part-time; 12 percent of those enrolled in school were working full-time.

This means that if we want young adults to commit to national service in large numbers, we must pledge to make it feasible for them to do so. Government, foundations, businesses, educational institutions, and others must all work together to provide the resources that would allow young adults from all backgrounds and walks of life to share in this opportunity to contribute to their country and their communities.

This task force, convened by the American Jewish Committee in furtherance of its commitment to a vibrant and democratic America, and as a reaffirmation of its longtime support for national service, seeks to detail some of the benefits that a year of voluntary, continuous service would offer to both the server and the served, and to begin to imagine how to cast open the door to civilian national service, welcoming all those who seek to do work on behalf of their country. We do not offer a detailed blueprint, but focus instead on how to encourage and support greater participation in public service on a national scale, and as a national resource.

We strongly urge the leaders of our political parties, particularly as they begin the process of choosing their candidates for the 2008 presidential election, to seize the opportunity before us, and to make a major national service initiative a part of their party platforms.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEW DEAL NETWORK

The Civilian Conservation Corps, established by Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Depression, contained within it the seeds of subsequent American national service models.

## A History of Civilian National Service in America

“...we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

Declaration of Independence

Even before this country was the United States of America, its early settlers embraced the idea of volunteer service for the common good. Neighbors banded together to raise barns and build houses, hire a teacher and start one-room schools, plant and harvest crops, put out fires and prevent flooding. The idea of national service, however, was inextricably associated with the military for much of the nation’s history. The concept of a federally driven civilian national service program first emerged in the 1930s, but since that time has repeatedly captured the interest and imagination of administrations on both sides of the political aisle.

### The 1930s

The first major government-supported national service effort was not conceived as a national service program at all. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was established by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 to provide work for the huge number of unemployed young men in America during the Great Depression. Although the CCC was at its core an emergency work-relief program, it contained within it the seeds of subsequent national service models, and earned much of its success from the pride participants took in contributing something valuable to their country during a time of crisis. FDR called the CCC “an Army enlisted against nature,” a reference to a speech given by the American philosopher and pacifist William James in 1906, which urged that “the whole youthful population” be recruited for nonmilitary national service. Roosevelt, clearly taken with this vision, also named a work site Camp William James in the philosopher’s honor.

Over the next nine years, 2.5 million men were sent to rural areas to do conservation work. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., wrote that they reclaimed more than natural resources, “they reclaimed and developed themselves.” More important than learning trades, he said, “they learned about America, and they learned about other Americans.” Despite its success, however, the CCC, which was established as a temporary program, was never made permanent by Congress, and was disbanded shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

### The 1960s

The next major wave of interest in federally sponsored civilian service began with President John F. Kennedy, who in March 1961 made good on a campaign promise by signing an executive order establishing the Peace Corps, through which volunteers would spend two years living and working in developing countries. In a speech that same month, Kennedy sketched out his vision for the program, one of young people “devoting part of their lives to peace

and to strengthening the ties that bind men together all over the globe,” noting, “they will learn as much as they will teach.” Six months later Congress made the program law, and it continues to thrive today.

Kennedy also introduced two domestic programs, neither of which met with the same success during his presidency, but both of which provided the foundations for programs that were initiated under President Lyndon Johnson. The first, a youth employment program designed to assist at-risk youth, contained elements that would become Johnson’s Job Corps. The second, the National Service Corps, was the precursor to Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), a program established in 1964, through which volunteers received a small stipend to live and work in impoverished communities.

Johnson, a strong proponent of national service, urged the nation in a February 1965 speech at the University of Kentucky to “search for new ways [by which] every young American will have the opportunity—and feel the obligation—to give at least a few years of his or her life to the service of others in the nation and in the world.” Since 1965, more than 140,000 Americans have served through VISTA, which was incorporated into AmeriCorps in 1993.

### The 1970s

President Richard Nixon next embraced the idea of volunteer service, creating, among other new entities, a cabinet committee on volunteer action, and consolidating many of the existing national service programs—including the Peace Corps, VISTA, and programs for senior volunteers—under a new federal agency, ACTION. The idea of service being linked to learning also gained momentum, and led to the creation of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), designed to teach young people about the environment through service.

### The 1980s

In accepting the Republican nomination for president in 1980, Ronald Reagan said:

Let us pledge to restore in our time the American spirit of volunteer service, of cooperation, of private and community initiative, a spirit that flows like a deep and mighty river through the history of our nation.

During the Reagan administration, the bully pulpit of the presidency was on occasion used eloquently to restore that spirit, but chiefly in terms of private and community initiatives. Existing federal service programs were continued, but the main expression of citizen service came through the growth of nongovernment service programs, many of whose founders' names are now engraved in medallions in the sidewalk of "The Extra Mile" walk that starts at 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, in Washington, D.C.

### The 1990s

President George H. W. Bush spoke of the contributions of a national network of community-based organizations, describing his vision as "a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky," and in 1990 established the private nonprofit Points of Light Foundation to link volunteers with community-based service opportunities. That same year Bush also signed into law the National and Community Service Act of 1990, proposed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, which created the Commission on National and Community Service, an independent, nonpartisan twenty-one-member agency charged with supporting national service initiatives.

National service on a major scale was also one of the key promises President Bill Clinton made to voters when he ran for the presidency in 1992. "Just think of it," he said, describing what he called a season of service, "millions of energetic young men and women serving their country by teaching children, policing the streets, caring for the sick, working with the elderly or people with disabilities, building homes for the homeless, helping children stay off drugs

and out of gangs—giving us all a sense of hope and limitless possibilities."

This promise became a reality when, in 1993, Congress passed the National and Community Service Trust Act. The act consolidated under the new Corporation for National and Community Service the work and staffs of two existing agencies, Nixon's ACTION and Bush's Commission on National and Community Service, and established AmeriCorps, "a network of national service programs that engage Americans in intensive service to meet the nation's critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment." According to the corporation, more than 500,000 volunteers have served through AmeriCorps since 1994.

The corporation oversees three major federally-funded programs: the Senior Corps, a cluster of volunteer programs developed in the administrations of Presidents Johnson and Nixon that provide volunteer opportunities for older Americans; Learn and Serve America, a program rooted in the National and Community Service Act signed by President Bush, which allows students to integrate service projects with their classroom studies; and AmeriCorps, the immersive service programs launched under President Clinton.

By the end of the Clinton Administration, AmeriCorps had reached and was set to pass the 50,000 volunteers per year that Congress had authorized in 1993.

### 2000 and Beyond

After 9/11, President George W. Bush created, as a White House office and cabinet-level coordinating council, the USA Freedom Corps, which includes and promotes the established programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Peace Corps, and other major government domestic volunteer programs in several departments, as well as two new initiatives: an international volunteer aid program, Partners for Prosperity, and a nationwide network of local Citizen Corps councils to promote disaster preparedness and homeland security. The Freedom Corps also staffs a new President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. In his

2002 State of the Union Address, the president asked all Americans to volunteer at least two years in service at home or abroad during their lifetimes, and proposed increasing the Peace Corps from 7,000 to 14,000 participants per year, and expanding AmeriCorps from 50,000 to 75,000 per year, a goal that was reached by 2006.

In the legislative arena, Senators Evan Bayh and John McCain introduced the Call to Service Act in 2001, urging Congress and the president to add 25,000 participants a year to the AmeriCorps program, and to deploy them to meet critical needs in public safety, the environment, health, and education, with a special focus on homeland defense. They reintroduced a similar act along with Senator Edward Kennedy in 2003, but neither piece of legislation was enacted.

In 2004, Representatives Harold Ford, Tom Osborne, David Price, and Christopher Shays launched the National Service Congressional Caucus, a bipartisan group of members of Congress dedicated to raising awareness of national service and expanding service opportunities for all Americans. As of January of this year, the caucus had forty-six members.

And in the 2008 presidential campaign, a number of candidates on both sides of the aisle have gone on record in support of national service.



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## Why National Service?

In February of this year, David Eisner, the CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, testified before the House Committee on Education and Labor's Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities about the role of service and volunteering in America. He said, "Across America, our communities are at their best, healthiest and most effective when citizens partner to tackle our toughest problems: gangs, crime, drugs, homelessness, illiteracy, children aging out of foster care, elder care, dropouts, teen pregnancy and the divide between the haves and have-nots."

Yet undoubtedly, at least some of the social needs we have identified could be met by paid employees, and there has historically been some friction between those who favor service programs and unions and others who fear that those volunteers will depress wages or replace paid workers, in effect taking their jobs. So the question must be posed: Why service?

Studies of the return on investment of national service programs are in much need of updating, but we do know that service

programs offer a diverse array of benefits both to participants and to society, including providing services that would otherwise not be available to individuals and communities in need.

One 1996 study commissioned by the Corporation for National and Community Service measured the impact of eight state-based youth corps programs, in which young adults who were not in school engaged in full-time service, performing jobs such as clearing brush from park trails, planting trees, assisting teachers by reading to or tutoring students, and escorting patients to health-care appointments.

The report found that “the corps provided net increases in the services available in their communities, in most cases accomplishing work that would not have been done otherwise. Where respondents report that only ‘some’ of the work would have been accomplished without the program, the sponsor typically had access to requisite supplies and materials but lacked some, or all, of the person power needed to complete the project.”

In addition, because service programs link the rights and privileges of being American with a clear sense of responsibility, they are truly the gift that keeps on giving. By helping to create habits of civic engagement in young people that last a lifetime, they provide benefits to both participants and society. Research released this past January by City Year, an organization dedicated to service and civic engagement, and which is part of the AmeriCorps network, demonstrates that, compared to a control group of their peers, in later life its participants had increased rates of both voting and volunteering, and joined more civic organizations and community groups. Similarly, findings released in 2004 from a longitudinal study of the impact of AmeriCorps programs showed “statistically significant increases in: members’ connection to community, knowledge about problems facing their community, participation in community-based activities, and personal growth through service,” and these results pertained to “members of all types.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

## Recommendations

To help engage all Americans in the effort to meet unmet societal needs, and to encourage and promote long-term civic engagement, we recommend a national service initiative that is:

- Designed for young adults 18 to 25
- Voluntary but universally available to members of the target age group
- Immersive in nature, requiring a commitment of at least one year
- Structured to engage at least one million participants per year
- Supportive enough to be a viable option for all
- A multisector endeavor

### Why ages 18-25?

Evidence of the good works of Americans of all ages abounds. By no means should our focus on the 18-25-year-old cohort be interpreted to diminish the importance of service learning at younger ages or senior participation in service programs. We acknowledge, in particular, the value of creating opportunities for Americans of all ages to work together on common projects. Nonetheless, there are several reasons why we settled on this specific segment of the national population.

First, and most obviously, young people are typically best able to meet the physical requirements of some of the work the nation needs done. While not all service jobs will be physically demanding, and there can and should be service opportunities for people with a range of physical abilities, young people typically have a distinct advantage when clearing roads after a hurricane or nailing a roof on a new or repaired building.

Second, as we detailed earlier, this group lags behind both older and younger cohorts in its participation in volunteer activities, and we believe this is as much due to lack of opportunity as lack of will. Given adequate financial and other assistance, which we describe in more detail below, this group would be an unparalleled national asset and the missing link in a chain of lifelong public engagement.

Third, one cannot overstate the value of reaching young people as they are on the cusp of adulthood when they are open to new ideas and experiences. Targeting this group is an opportunity to inspire in young adults an enduring sense of social responsibility — and to offer a concrete alternative to alienation, cynicism or despair.

### What do we mean by “voluntary but universally available” to the target age group?

A compulsory model of national service, which has worked in some other countries around the globe, might have some advantages (see Appendix A). But because this country has never had such a program for domestic service and no compulsory universal (as opposed to by lottery) military draft in more than sixty years, we believe that

the country is neither ready nor willing—for philosophical as well as pragmatic reasons—to accept a mandatory system. We also believe that to urge the adoption of a compulsory system would jeopardize the chances that the American people would accept any broad-based system of voluntary national service.

We also strongly believe that young men and women outside the military can and should be of service to their country, and that we should accommodate every eligible individual who wants to volunteer on behalf of their nation. To fail to do so would be to squander a great gift.

### Why immersive?

The only way that the program we are advocating will achieve its goals is if it is an intense, immersive program. By that we mean it cannot be a part-time, come-in-when-you-can-and-do-what-you-can type of program; in order for it to have the intended impact, service must be participants’ central activity for a significant period in their lives.

This level of participation allows whatever training or experience participants gain to pay off for the program and its beneficiaries, and it also helps ensure that participants gain all they can from the experience. In 1986, the Ford Foundation published a study by two former Carter administration officials, Richard Danzig and Peter Szanton, entitled “National Service, What Would It Mean?” In it, they noted:

Military veterans, Peace Corps alumni, and, ironically, immigrants, are now virtually the only Americans who experience a sense of citizenship earned rather than simply received. As a result, they often value themselves and their country more highly. Forms of national service that require sacrifice, intensive effort or some risk might offer that sense to all.

Similarly, in “Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and Their Communities,” a follow-up to the 1996 Youth Corps study mentioned above, the authors cited the immersive experience of the programs as one of the factors that contributed to their positive impact on at-risk youth:

Participation in youth corps is typically full-time, lasting months and sometimes as much as a year; they are experiences that occupy a majority of participants' available time. Generally, corps members are required to actively participate 40 hours or more per week; travel to and from service sites can often add 10 hours or more to their regular work week. Much of the work is hard, physical labor; even the less physically rigorous projects are mentally or emotionally draining. At the same time, the day-to-day demands of the program tend to preclude participation in other, perhaps less positive, activities. As one corps member who had been active in a gang prior to the corps commented, "when I'm done here [at the service site], I don't have the time or energy to hang with those guys." The intensity of the service experience makes it more likely to have a permanent effect on the participants.

Some programs have achieved the desired results in approximately ten months; others last for two years or more, like the Peace Corps and Teach for America. City Year, which was the model that inspired candidate Bill Clinton to propose large-scale national service, has defined a year's service on the academic model of ten months, and AmeriCorps defines a year of service as 1,700 hours. We recommend at least one year of service as the standard, with flexibility in the determination of hours worked and vacation time.

### **Why one million participants?**

According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, right now there are more than 30 million 18-25-year-olds in America, and each year about four million young people will turn 18. Some of those individuals will not be available to serve for a variety of reasons, but many will. This task force neither recommends nor envisions the immediate absorption of millions of young Americans into the volunteer service force, but what it does foresee as desirable—and possible—is the goal of adding, gradually and incrementally, to the current number of young Americans in national service. We propose adding at least 500,000 participants within the next five years and then continuing to increase participation until the total of one million per year is reached by the year 2020.

If one quarter of all 18-25-year-olds would serve her or his country in this manner, we believe an important cultural change would have occurred.

### **What do we mean by “supportive?”**

In the past, some critics of national service have accused service programs of elitism, of being a feel-good option for the children of the upper class. Former Congressman Dick Army once called AmeriCorps a program for “aspiring Yuppies”—an unfair characterization, but one that has its roots in the idea that only the rich can afford to volunteer their time.

National service as we envision it would be inclusive and broad-based, with appeal for young Americans in every state and station in life, rich or poor, urban or rural, no matter what their race or gender or religion. Indeed, a focus of our inquiry has been precisely on the question of how to engage the broadest spectrum of young Americans who are not in service programs. Our conclusion is that if we are to make national service a national enterprise, we must provide broader and deeper financial support and benefits to participants. Today, full-time AmeriCorps participants receive \$10,000 a year for living expenses. They also receive an education credit of \$4,725, which might be enough to pay for a year at most state institutions (if the student lives at home), but would be only a small percentage of the tuition at any private college or university in America. What's more, these benefits are taxable. To be meaningful, this education benefit should be enhanced.

By working with both the public and private sectors to provide increased educational benefits and other financial assistance, we would offer many more young adults a real opportunity to spend a year immersed in national service. In addition, by devising resources that reach a broader cohort, we hope to begin to approach a level of participation closer to universal without mandating service. Some of the innovative ideas we have considered include:

- Matching funds and other benefits from all educational and training institutions, not just colleges and universities

- A “national service leave” program whereby participants are guaranteed they can come back to their old jobs without losing seniority
- A greater percentage of tuition loan forgiveness the longer you stay in the program (for college grads or near grads, until they reach 25)
- Good rates on small business loans or mortgages
- Preferential rates for nonterm full life insurance
- Larger discounts (like those sometimes given veterans) on all major purchases, from homes to vehicles and major appliances, especially high-tech equipment
- Compassionate leaves with pay, and emergency loans once participants are in the program

As to those who object to “paying” volunteers by providing stipends, incentives or other support, Arizona Senator John McCain once did as well, but experience changed his opinion. Speaking at a 2003 conference to announce the publication of *United We Serve*, a collection of essays on national service, he said:

I was a skeptic concerning AmeriCorps, in particular, and the concept of paying people or compensating people for volunteerism, and community activities and service to one’s country, and I initially opposed the AmeriCorps bill. And I am happy to tell you that over the years, due to my close contact with and exposure to AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, and many other volunteer organizations around this nation, I’ve come to believe that it’s the very essence of patriotism because I believe the essence of patriotism is service to a cause greater than one’s self-interests.

### **What do we mean by “a multisector endeavor?”**

If we are to succeed in bringing a true cross-section of young adults into national civilian service in significant numbers, government must work in concert with foundations, businesses, and other institutions in both the public and private sectors to make national service a real option for all. We envision a vital role for educational

institutions, particularly the community colleges, which are in a position both to facilitate outreach efforts to potential program participants and to help identify local needs, and we call upon colleges and universities to make it clear that the experience of national service will be given favorable weight in admissions decisions. Similarly, we would ask that corporations and other businesses consider service experience favorably when making employment decisions. The more we as a nation participate fully in the endeavor, the more chance it will have to succeed at all levels.



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## Conclusion

In sum, we share the opinions expressed by Will Marshall and Marc Magee in *United We Serve, National Service and the Future of Citizenship*:

Our ultimate goal should be to make national service a common expectation—a civic rite of passage for young Americans and an opportunity for older Americans to pass something on to their children and grandchildren.... It should become a truly national enterprise that helps usher in an era of big citizenship where Americans from all backgrounds are brought together to tackle the great challenges of our time.... This new experiment with national service has reached the point where it must take a great leap forward.... While the era of big government is over, big challenges still remain. Scaling up America's national service programs will make it possible for us as a nation to tackle these big challenges with big citizenship.

Oscar Wilde wrote that a cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing, while a romantic knows the value of everything and the price of nothing. We are neither cynical nor romantic. We know that recommitting to national service will not be easy nor will it be inexpensive. We know that it will confer tremendous responsibility and demand great accountability. But it is difficult to quantify the benefits of enhanced understanding and tolerance of America's diversity, the value of better understanding on the part of young people of the work of government and the nonprofit sector, their greater participation in volunteer activities throughout life, a greater propensity to vote, and their having a greater sense of the collective "we." As Rahm Emanuel and Bruce Reed explain in their 2006 book, *The Plan: Big Ideas for America*, universal service could "give young people a chance early in their lives to look past differences of race, class, creed, and region, and to see themselves and one another first and foremost as Americans."

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Imagine an America in which a million young people are engaged in full-time civilian service to their country each year....

Imagine an America in which corporations, foundations, and institutions of higher learning team with government to harness the potential of young people....

Imagine an America in which leaders in all sectors give voice to the importance of service to our country....

Imagine....

## Appendix A: National Service in Other Countries

All over the world in the twenty-first century, more and more young people are enrolling in national service, generally called National Youth Services. Civilian national services have been adopted for numerous reasons, among them: fostering national unity; making conscription more equitable; providing young people with employment-related experience; improving their employability; and achieving such social objectives as helping poor people or the environment; and enabling students to pay for their education. Civilian national services have been established in over thirty countries.

“In the most common national service model,” writes task force member Susan Stroud, founder and executive director of Innovations in Civic Participation, “young people in their late teens and twenties spend a year working full-time to meet local communities’ needs. But within that broad model, details vary considerably from country to country. The government might control programs centrally, and its military might be involved in civilian service programs (Kenya), or the central government might determine criteria and funding and deliver services through nongovernmental organizations, also known as NGOs (United States). Programs also differ in terms of mandatory versus voluntary participation, length of service, and levels of compensation and benefits provided to participants. Participation might be limited to targeted groups (university graduates in Nigeria and China) or open to all young people (Italy and the United States).”

### Australia

For decades, compulsory military service was a hotly debated topic in Australia, but the country did away with conscription in 1972, one year before the United States. Today, one of the country’s more successful programs is its ten-year-old Green Corps, which combines six months of conservation work with skill training for 17- to 20-year-old men and women. Each year, some 2,000 cadets serve with Green Corps, which is funded by the government and administered by Conservation Volunteers Australia.

### Chile

In April 2007, the Chilean army became an all-volunteer force for the first time in the country’s history, a development observers hope will

have a positive effect on an increasingly positive attitude toward national service. In 2005, in Chile, as in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay, service learning expanded rapidly in schools.

### China

China’s Young Volunteer Poverty Alleviation Relay program aims to ease the burden of poverty in rural areas. Eighty percent of the programs are run at the local level, the remainder by the central government. The central government sets regulations, provides medical insurance, and pays some travel costs plus a subsistence stipend. The age range is 20–45, with most volunteers in their twenties, and applicants must have good health, a university education, and a spirit of volunteerism. The term of service is six months to two years, with most giving one year. About 3,500 cadets serve each year, and China spends an estimated \$4 million, including local contributions. Cadets get medical and some travel cost benefits; a stipend of \$800 a year, and the communities where the cadet serves often provide housing and a bicycle. Cadets serve mostly in rural areas in central and western China. When they have finished their service, they may enter their next jobs without going through the usual probationary period. As for the types of service, about 70 percent of the young people teach, either at the primary or secondary level, while others serve primarily in public health and agriculture.

### Gambia

In 1996, Gambia founded its National Youth Service, which enrolls men and women from 17 to 25 years of age for a period of two years. A six-week paramilitary training course is followed by twenty-two months of skills training and community service. At the end of their terms, cadets reassemble for a debriefing and a ceremony at which they are awarded national service certificates.

### Germany

In Germany, where the future of conscription has also been a topic of debate in recent years, *Zivildienst*, the civilian service alternative, has become the program of choice for the majority of young people. All young men 18–23 are required to serve in the military for a nine-month period, while women are exempt, but may enlist and serve as professional soldiers. To serve in *Zivildienst* instead of the *Bundeswehr*, the German armed forces, draftees file a petition and write an essay describing their reasons for requesting recognition as a conscientious objector. A recognized objector can either negotiate to serve with a particular accred-

ited service institution or be assigned to one. Currently, both civilian and military service is for nine months. Each year there are about 100,000 cadets in Zivildienst, for which the budget, including local contributions, is about \$1.3 billion. Cadets receive a subsistence stipend and usually are assigned to care for very old persons and disabled persons, often by providing nursing services.

### Israel

Everyone must serve in the Israeli Army, men for three years and women for two. According to Washington University's Global Service Institute, "The comprehensive draft system to the IDF, the Israel Defense Force, is in operation since Israel's independence in 1948. Currently Israel has the highest proportion of military service participants in any democratic nation in the world. Although conscription is theoretically universal, recent studies conducted by the IDF indicate that by the year 2005, less than half of the annual cohort of 18-year-old Israeli citizens, men and women, will in fact perform military service. Furthermore, unofficial estimates anticipate that by the year 2012, fewer than 50 percent of the electorate will have served in the IDF." In a 2004 study entitled "National Service in Israel: Motivations, Volunteer Characteristics, and Levels of Content," done for the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Moshe Sherer of Tel Aviv University wrote:

The importance in Israeli society of service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is well known. Less well known are the voluntary alternatives to serving in the IDF through National Service.... The findings [of this study] suggest that parents and friends have the greatest influence on the decision to serve in the National Service. Altruistic motives are the main category of motivation for serving, followed by environmental pressure, and idealism. Overall, respondents were satisfied with their experiences, especially in regard to their coworkers' attitudes. Although some dissatisfaction was expressed, it was not with the work itself but rather with the lack of public appreciation.

### Italy

Italy, which ended military conscription on January 1, 2005, had earlier set up a new program called National Civic Service in 1998. The program, in which both men and women from 18-28 serve a twelve-month term, was designed to address social exclusion and enhance constitutional principles of social solidarity; develop civic, social, cultural, and pro-

fessional values among young people; provide civil defense in emergencies; preserve the environment; provide social assistance; and promote the country's culture and education. Over the course of its six-year pilot phase, it enrolled both volunteers and military conscientious objectors. In 2003 alone, it totaled 15,000 volunteers and 85,000 objectors. How the program, which has sufficient funds to support 60,000 young people per year, will be affected by the end of conscription is not yet known.

### Nigeria

Since 1973, as part of its concerted efforts after the civil war of the 1960s to foster national unity and to create common ties among its youth, Nigeria (which does not have military conscription) has required university and polytechnic institute graduates to take part in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program. People who are over 30 at graduation or have previously served in the military are exempt. Corps members have to serve in states other than their own or where they went to university. Service, which is for one year, starts with an orientation camp of about a month and ends with a "passing out ceremony." Then the volunteers are sent to a place of primary assignment, which, for 70 percent of corps members, means teaching at a school. In Nigeria, corps members are expected to initiate community development projects in the areas where they serve. At first, many corps members are unhappy at being sent to a distant part of the country, but a 1993 study of former corps members' attitudes about being posted far from home showed that in retrospect nine out of ten had positive feelings.

## Appendix B: About the Task Force

**Susan Abravanel** is the education director at SOLV, an Oregon nonprofit community-based organization engaging volunteers statewide in environmental restoration and enhancement, and serves on the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee.

**Roy E. Bahat** is a vice president of News Corporation and previously worked for the government of New York City on New York's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games and the development plans for Ground Zero. He is a Rhodes Scholar and a former president of the Phillips Brooks House Association, a student-run public service organization at Harvard University.

**Burt S. Barnow**, Ph.D., is associate director for research and principal research scientist at the Institute for Policy Studies at the Johns Hopkins University.

**David R. Caplan**, during a lengthy career in the textile and apparel business, served as CEO of both Evan Picone and Concord Fabrics. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of City Year New York.

**Itai Dinour** is the co-executive director at City Year New York and oversees the site's external affairs, programs, and community partnership.

**Robert H. Elman** is retired chairman, CEO, and founder of DESA International, a major manufacturer of products for the home improvement industry, and serves on the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee.

**Veda Engel** is a recruiter for the U.S. Department of State and is the coordinator of a Task Force Committee for the U.S. Public Service Academy.

**E. Robert Goodkind**, a partner in the New York law firm of Pryor Cashman LLP, is the immediate past president of the American Jewish Committee.

**Colonel Rob Gordon**, retired, is the senior vice president for civic leadership at City Year, a member of AmeriCorps, which was a policy initiative he helped found when he was a White House fellow and director of special operations for the Office of National Service in 1993.

**Evan Heller** is currently the president of the Board of Trustees of the Rye Neck School District.

**Michael J. Hirschhorn** is the executive director of the Coro New York Leadership Center.

**Jill Weinick Iscol** is a donor activist and president of the IF Hummingbird Foundation, a family foundation established by the Iscols in 1989, whose mission is to support domestic and global efforts that strengthen democracy and reduce the social justice, economic and educational inequities that threaten it.

**Alan S. Jaffe** is the immediate past chairman and managing partner of Proskauer Rose, and the immediate past chair of the American Jewish Committee's Domestic Policy Commission.

**Gerald B. Kauvar** is the special assistant to the president and professorial lecturer in English Literature at the George Washington University.

**Harris L. Kempner, Jr.**, is president and portfolio manager of Kempner Capital Management in Galveston, Texas, and is the immediate past treasurer/secretary of the American Jewish Committee.

**Daniel Kohl** has recently left the Milwaukee Bucks, where he worked for the past fourteen years, to pursue private business interests, and is a member of the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee.

**Martin Krall**, senior counsel to Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, serves on various for-profit and not-for-profit boards, including that of the American Jewish Committee.

**Kathryn Newcomer** is the director of the Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration program and associate director of the School of Public Policy and Public Administration at the George Washington University and is serving as president of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) for 2006-07.

**Arleen Rifkind** is a professor of pharmacology at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University and is a member of the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee.

**Shirley Sagawa**, cofounder of the sagawa/jospin consulting firm, is a national expert on children's policy and philanthropy and has been called a "founding mother of the modern service movement" in the United States. Shirley was instrumental in drafting and assuring the passage of

legislation creating the Corporation for National Service and was the corporation's first chief operating and policy officer.

**Benjamin Samuels** is the CEO of Victory Packaging, a North American distributor of packaging materials based in Houston, Texas, and is a member of the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee.

**William Schambra** is the director of Hudson Institute's Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal. Schambra was appointed by the president to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2002.

**Ed W. Scott, Jr.**, is a retired high-technology executive and former official in the U.S. government. He was a founder of BEA Systems, Inc., and was an assistant secretary of transportation in the Carter administration and a deputy assistant attorney general in the Ford and Nixon administrations.

**Dr. Wayne S. Sellman** is vice president and director for strategic planning at the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) in Alexandria, Virginia.

**Alan Solomont** is a philanthropist, political activist, and healthcare entrepreneur. In 2000, Mr. Solomont was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the Board of Directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**Susan E. Stroud** is the executive director of Innovations in Civic Participation, a nonprofit organization she founded in 2001 to support the development of programs and policy innovations in national and community service globally. One of the White House architects of the National and Community Trust Act of 1993, she served in senior positions at the Corporation for National and Community Service to implement AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America.

**Herbert Sturz** is a trustee of the Open Society Institute, the global foundation started by financier and philanthropist George Soros.

**Nancy E. Tate** is the executive director of the League of Women Voters of the United States and the League of Women Voters Education Fund, the nation's premier nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and works to increase understanding of major public policy issues through education, dialogue, and advocacy.

**Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, task force chair**, serves as the fifteenth president of the George Washington University and is a member of the executive committee of the American Jewish Committee. As of August 2007, he will be president emeritus and university professor of public service at GWU.

**Harris Wofford** is a former senator from Pennsylvania and former CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, and later the chairman of America's Promise. In 1961-62, while serving as special assistant to the president for civil rights, he helped Sargent Shriver organize the Peace Corps, of which he later became associate director.

Staff and Contributors:

**Jeffrey Sinensky** is general counsel and director of domestic policy for AJC.

**Kara Stein** is the associate director of domestic policy and legal affairs for AJC.

**John Greenya** is a writer based in Washington, D.C. He is the author of several books, and has written for the *New York Times*, the *New Republic*, the *Washington Post* and other publications.

**Andie Coller** is a strategic communications consultant based in Washington, D.C.



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