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Relevant memoranda will be released in conjunction with the Commission’s public hearings. Staff encourages those with views on issues under discussion during the hearings to provide their input to the Commission at www.inspire2serve.gov and stands ready to revise its current understanding of these issues in light of new information as the Commission’s work continues.

Background

The March 28, 2019, public hearings provide an opportunity for public discussion of policy options the Commission is considering with respect to *national service* – defined in the Commission’s mandate as “civilian participation in any non-governmental capacity, including with private for-profit organizations and non-profit organizations (including with appropriate faith-based organizations), that pursues and enhances the common good and meets the needs of communities, the States, or the Nation in sectors related to security, health, care for the elderly, and other areas considered appropriate by the Commission.”

Policy Options

This memo details a series of policy options that generally address two topics:

- (1) Improving current national service policies and processes*
- (2) Creating more national service opportunities*

The policy options described below focus primarily on full-time, termed volunteer opportunities with organizations sponsored or managed by the federal government—namely, programs funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the Peace Corps. However, the Commission is exploring alternatives to include faith-based, non-profit, and private-sector organizations in relation to policy options to create additional national service opportunities.

(1) Improving current policies and processes

Raise Awareness of National Service Opportunities

The American system of national service is complex and decentralized. As a result, many Americans misunderstand national service and are unfamiliar with options to participate in a national service opportunity. A study commissioned by Service Year Alliance in 2015 demonstrated that fewer than one third of 14- to 24-year-olds are aware of service year options.¹ Alternatives to clarify the public’s understanding of national service, improve exposure of national service opportunities, and strengthen marketing, branding, and recruitment include:

¹ “Recruitment Best Practices,” Service Year Alliance, Accessed August 16, 2018, https://about.serviceyear.org/recruitment_best_practices.



- Invest in a national public awareness campaign that includes enabling CNCS, the Peace Corps, and the Government Publishing Office to produce and distribute print materials for K-12 schools, Selective Service System registrants, American Job Centers, and military recruitment centers.
- Require agencies to include national service information on all public-facing federal websites, forms, and publications, such as the Department of Education's federal student aid website, the Selective Service System's registration website, and USAJOBS.
- Establish common and unified AmeriCorps branding requirements to ensure branding is included on all grantee brochures, service uniforms, and service opportunity announcements.
- Authorize and fund new national service grant programs for K-12 schools to increase students' exposure and access to service opportunities.

Increase the AmeriCorps Living Allowance

AmeriCorps members receive in-service benefits to cover living expenses while serving in national service positions. However, the living allowance is typically near the poverty line and cannot reliably cover necessities for some participants.² The limited AmeriCorps living allowance deters those without access to additional financial support from desiring to serve and reduces access even among those who remain inspired to serve. In particular, the living allowance limits the participation of opportunity youth (teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither working nor in school). Alternatives to improve current policies include:

- Eliminate maximum restrictions on all CNCS living allowances and stipends.
- Increase the AmeriCorps State and National living allowance.
- Increase the Senior Corps stipend.
- Provide annual cost-of-living adjustments for all national service living allowances and stipends.

Modernize AmeriCorps Educational Benefits

The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (Segal Award) serves as the primary post-service benefit for members who complete a term of service in AmeriCorps. However, the award has several constraints that limit its value. Alternatives to increase overall usability of the Segal Award and its value as a tool to reward those who serve with college tuition or loan repayment include:

- Exempt the Segal Award from the federal income tax by excluding the award from taxable income at the federal and state-level when used for tuition and repayment of student loans.
- Allow all AmeriCorps alumni to elect to receive a discounted end-of-service cash stipend at the completion of their term of service in lieu of the full Segal Award.
- Increase the Segal Award to match average in-state tuition for 4-year public institutions.
- Allow all AmeriCorps alumni to use the Segal Award at the same education, training, and assistance programs authorized by the Department of Veterans Affairs' Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

² The 2018 minimum living allowance amount is \$13,732 and maximum is \$27,464. Only "Professional Corps" programs may provide a salary in excess of the maximum statutory living allowance.; Corporation for National and Community Service, "AmeriCorps State and National Policy FAQs," Accessed Nov 7, 2018, <https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/policy%20FAQs%207.31.14%20final%20working%20hyperlink.pdf>.



Improve Access to Service Opportunities for Diverse & Underserved Populations

Both CNCS and the Peace Corps seek to ensure participant diversity yet struggle with expanding the demographic representation of their members.³ Alternatives to address accessibility barriers for diverse and underserved populations include:

- Increase investments in existing national service programs that engage Opportunity Youth and tribal communities, such as YouthBuild, the Conservation Corps, and the National Guard Youth Challenge.
- Authorize AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs to be partners of Department of Labor through the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act to enable the use of national service corps as assets for workforce development (Title I) activities and adult education and literacy (Title II) programs.
- Incentivize AmeriCorps sponsor organizations to establish standardized wraparound services such as food pantries, transportation passes, service uniform(s), transition advising, and housing assistance for members in need.
- Create a new, more flexible child care allowance program that improves access to service opportunities for parents by allowing members to choose a discounted monthly cash stipend in lieu of full monthly child care costs paid directly to the child care center.
- Allow older Americans with higher incomes to participate in the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companions programs.
- Encourage the Peace Corps to implement a "virtual volunteer" service model to incorporate more people with disabilities in national service.
- Promote "reintegration of ex-offenders" as a national service priority for CNCS.

Expand National Service Incentives through Institutions of Higher Education

Many institutions of higher education (IHEs) encourage national service participation by recognizing service as a highly valued option for students as they finish high school, before they enter higher education, or as they transition to their careers. Federal options to engage more IHEs in this effort include:

- Require all public colleges and universities to charge in-state tuition rates to all AmeriCorps alumni and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers.
- Create a national recognition program that honors IHEs that recognize and encourage service experiences, such as by offering tuition incentives or course credit to national service alumni or providing on-campus opportunities for community service.

³ Corporation for National and Community Service, "AmeriCorps Member Impact Synthesis: The past 20 years of research on how service shapes the member" (PowerPoint presentation, Southern National Service Training Conference, December 2017), https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/AmeriCorpsMemberImpactSynthesis_disabilityDec2017_d2_0.pdf; and, 2017 *Annual Volunteer Survey Results: Global Tabular Report* (Washington, D.C., Peace Corps, November 2017), Accessed March 5, 2019, https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/2017_AVS_Global_Tabular_Report.pdf.



(2) Creating more national service opportunities

Expand Existing Sources and Establish New and Nontraditional Sources of Funding

National service programs have been supported by varying levels of federal appropriations since 1973. Alternatives to expand sources of federal funding or create new mechanisms to fund more national service opportunities for individuals and communities across the country include:

- Allow taxpayers to make voluntary contributions to national service programs as part of the federal income tax filing process and encourage states to do the same.
- Allow CNCS to access and use federal funds collected by federal agencies through fines, fees, and special assessments to support national service programs.
- Create a congressionally-chartered foundation with a broad fundraising mandate for CNCS and the Peace Corps.
- Call on private employers to create independent service corps and allow employees to take extended leave to complete a service term.
- Authorize CNCS to implement a national recognition program to recognize private-sector employers with advanced corporate social responsibility frameworks or that meaningfully contribute to national service goals.

Create More Service Opportunities through New or Expanded National Service Models

Although between 80,000 and 85,000 individuals serve the nation through full-time AmeriCorps or Peace Corps opportunities, and over 200,000 seniors participate in Senior Corps programs, the potential for service in a country of more than 329 million people remains largely untapped. Alternatives for creating new national service opportunities include:

- Authorize and federally-fund a national service fellowship demonstration program that empowers individuals to select their own service opportunity at a certified nonprofit of their choosing.
- Encourage the creation of national service opportunities that qualify as DOL apprenticeships.
- Authorize and encourage all federal agencies to create federal service corps to assist in their mission.
- Encourage CNCS to extend grant incentives such as match-requirement exceptions and standardized wraparound services for all programs that operate within Opportunity Zones (defined under the Tax Act of 2017) and programs operating on tribal lands.
- Increase tax incentives for private organizations and individuals that donate to CNCS-affiliated programs located in Opportunity Zones.
- Restructure the Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion programs as competitive grant models.
- Increase the requirement for off-campus Federal Work Study from 7 percent to 25 percent so more students can serve and support community organizations.

Issues to Consider

Benefits of National Service

A convincing body of research suggests that national service programs provide a wide range of benefits to individuals. Participants have greater educational attainment, higher incomes, high likelihood of



employment, greater civic involvement, improved health outcomes, and improved civic attitudes.⁴ Further, exposure to new communities and people of different backgrounds may increase cultural awareness and open-mindedness.⁵ In addition, some research suggests national service has a measurable impact on communities and helps to address unmet needs of the nation. In 2013, one study calculated the benefits of youth service to provide \$6.5 billion in social benefits and \$2.5 billion in fiscal benefits, while senior national service was shown to provide \$1.4 billion in social benefits and \$400 million in fiscal benefits.⁶

However, long-term longitudinal studies – studies that follow participants for longer than ten years – of national service participation are few and have not been completed for a variety of reasons, including the significant costs of such studies, decentralized data collection throughout the national service community, and changes in national service programs over time. Further, some evidence in the moderate-term suggests that certain benefits to individuals largely vanish when compared to control groups comprised of similarly situated candidates who did not participate in service.⁷ While qualitative research suggests that national service changes the lives of those who serve in the programs as well as those who are beneficiaries of the service programs, discussions on the measurable impacts of national service across different levels of analysis are likely to persist.

Investment in National Service

Studies examining the return on investment (ROI) or cost-benefit analysis of national service programs are among the most challenging evaluations to conduct. One frequently-cited study on external benefits suggests a positive return on investment, with estimated benefits ranging from \$1.20 to over \$4.00 for every dollar invested in national service.⁸ However, estimates from cost-benefit studies are subject to the robustness of the assumptions and data on which they are based. Thus, opponents of national service may challenge the assumptions commonly used to calculate national service ROI as undervaluing opportunity costs or limiting comparisons to alternative approaches, such as philanthropic funding or private-sector service provision. As with many other areas, additional high-quality research examining ROI or cost-benefit analysis of national service would better inform policymakers on how best to improve current national service policies and processes, and create more national service opportunities across the country.

The March public hearing of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service is intended to generate discussion of issues surrounding national service in America. Feedback can be shared at www.inspire2serve.gov/content/share-your-thoughts.

⁴ See, e.g., *National Evaluation of Youth Corps: Findings at Follow-Up* (Washington, D.C., Corporation for National and Community Service, June 2011), https://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/nat_eval_youthcorps_impactreport.pdf; Andrea Finley, Constance Flanagan, and Laura Wray-Lake, "Civic Engagement Patterns and Transitions Over 8 Years: The AmeriCorps National Study," *Developmental Psychology* 47, no. 6 (November 2011): 1728–43, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025360>; and Peter Z. Schochet, John Burghardt, and Sheena McConnell, "Does Job Corps Work? Impact Findings from the National Job Corps Study," *American Economic Review* 95, no. 5 (December 2008): 1864–86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29730155>.

⁵ Margaret S. Sherraden, Benjamin Lough, and Amanda Moore McBride, "Effects of international volunteering and service: Individual and institutional predictors," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 19, no. 4 (November 2008): 395, <https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Voluntas-Effects-of-IVS-Ins-and-Ind-Predictors.pdf>.

⁶ Clive Belfield, *The Economic Value of National Service* (Washington, D.C., The Aspen Institute, September 2013), <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/economic-value-national-service-0/>.

⁷ Anne Roder and Mark Elliot, *Sustained Gains: Year Up's Continued Impact on Young Adults' Earnings*, (New York, N.Y., Economic Mobility Corporation, May 2014), <https://economicmobilitycorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Sustained-Gains-Summary.pdf>.

⁸ Clive Belfield, *The Economic Value of National Service* (Washington, D.C., The Aspen Institute, September 2013), <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/economic-value-national-service-0/>.