



## Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

### 100% Youth Civic Participation Policy Agenda Proposal

This proposal is for a public policy agenda that encourages civic participation, volunteerism, advocacy, and community service of youth ages 5-25.

If we want people climb the civic ladder throughout their lives from

- volunteering *into* service-learning, project-based learning with community impact, or action civics *into* social entrepreneurship or leadership roles into full time national, military, or public service; as well as from
- voting *into* ongoing individual civic participation *into* community organizing or leadership of advocacy campaigns *into* running for public office or serving in a public decision-making roles,

we must start by achieving 100% youth volunteering (ages 5-25) and 100% youth voting (ages 18-25) rates. That means that 100% of communities (states, cities, counties, school districts) and 100% of K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and nonprofits that serve youth or engage volunteers must offer programs that provide the opportunities for youth to participate.

We propose an agenda for the federal, state, and local governments to build the infrastructure for local communities – and organizations and schools in all communities – to engage all young people as volunteers and voters first and to encourage more sustained civic participation.

#### Need/Problem/Issue

In the introduction to the latest Volunteering in America report, Barbara L. Stewart, the current CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service wrote, “Volunteers are tuned into their communities in ways that non-volunteers are not. They help their neighbors twice as often as those who sit on the sidelines. They are joiners, belonging to groups or organizations at five times the rate of those who don’t volunteer. They donate to charity at twice the rate of the non-volunteer group and vote at 66 percent-higher rates.” If we want to improve the civic health of the country, we should start with increasing volunteer rates. To increase volunteer rates of adults, we need to increase the volunteer rates of youth ages 5-18. Just like other desired skills and behaviors, learning and practicing civic knowledge, skills, and behaviors need to be a part of growing up in America.

Currently, the adult volunteer rate is 30.3 percent. The youth volunteer rate is 26.1 percent. (And in a very-likely correlation, the youth voting rate in the 2018 midterm elections was 28

percent.) While we often celebrate year-to-year increases in these rates, [high school and college student volunteer rates have been stagnant for the last decade](#)<sup>(1)</sup> and we still leave out more than two-thirds of young people. We also know that these rates are lower among underserved populations – youth from low-income families and racial/ethnic minorities. The civic participation gap likely mirrors the achievement and skills gaps in education as well as many other indicators of well-being that show gaps among demographic minorities.

Data also shows that young people are more likely to volunteer when engaged through schools, youth organizations, or religious groups.

We know why young people don't participate:

- They're not asked by or connected to opportunities through caring adults / peer leaders.
- They're not taught the knowledge and skills required to participate.
- They're not able to overcome systemic barriers to participation, often a result of family income which results in underserved communities, especially racial/ethnic minorities, being left out.
- They're disaffected and disillusioned, not believing that their involvement will make a difference, or disconnected and apathetic, not wanting to participate at all.

High quality youth engagement programs ask them to get involved, teach them how to be active citizens, remove barriers to their participation, and show them that they really can make a difference both as individuals and as a generation.

## **Approach**

The [CivX Now Coalition policy agenda](#)<sup>(2)</sup> and the [National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service Interim Report](#)<sup>(3)</sup> – among other agendas and reports published by our partner organizations – outline policy ideas that focus on:

- Setting requirements and/or standards (at this time, we do not advocate for any federal requirements or standards, and encourage local decision-making);
- Building infrastructure (including staffing in government agencies) to support programs and disburse significant government funding to reach all communities, especially underserved communities to increase equity;
- Providing professional development, training & technical assistance to grantees and nonprofit partners to implement policies and programs; and
- Increasing evaluation, assessment, and accountability with public reporting and recognition.

We propose a three-phase policy agenda to achieve these goals:

1. Invest in and scale up already-authorized programs.
2. Increase coordination between agencies and between the federal and state and local governments as well as private sector philanthropy and leading nonprofits.
3. When and where appropriate, pass new legislation to create new requirements or authorize new programs based on effective models funded by programs in phase I or to meet gaps that remain even after all current programs are fully funded.

This cycle also should be completed at the state and local (city, county, school district) levels.

#### Phase 1: Invest in and scale up already-authorized programs.

There are many programs that are already authorized, but don't have enough (or any) funding appropriated. In the short term, we recommend significantly increased appropriations for the Volunteer Generation Fund. The goals of Volunteer Generation Fund as described in the Serve America Act legislation are to:

- Assist nonprofit, faith based, and other civic organizations by expanding and improving the capacity of such organizations to utilize such volunteers;
- Spur innovation in volunteer recruitment and management practices, with the goal of increasing the number of volunteers; and
- Enable the people of the U.S. to effect change by participating in active volunteer and citizen service.

The Serve America Act authorized \$50,000,000 for fiscal year 2010; \$60,000,000 for fiscal year 2011; \$70,000,000 for fiscal year 2012; \$80,000,000 for fiscal year 2013; and \$100,000,000 for fiscal year 2014 and beyond. The FY 2019 budget included \$5,400,000 for this fund, so there could be another \$94.6 million appropriated annually under current authorization. Of the funds allocated by CNCS for this program, A) CNCS shall use 50 percent of such funds to award grants, on a competitive basis, to State Commissions and nonprofit organizations for such fiscal year; and (B) CNCS shall use 50 percent of such funds make an allotment to the State Commissions. Several state commissions already use these funds to support youth volunteer engagement, and enough increased appropriations would trigger the competitive funds to organizations other than state service commissions.

Longer term, the primary program we recommend renewing appropriations for is Learn and Serve America in the Corporation for National and Community Service budget. Learn and Serve America was previously funded at up to \$39.5 million a year and engaged 1.1 million students annually. The Serve America Act authorized funding up to \$97 million a year for subtitle B service-learning programs. Funding was completely eliminated as part of the budget agreement in April 2011 and has not been funded since, [leading to a loss of existing infrastructure and](#)

[professional development in most states.](#)<sup>(4)</sup> Specifically, we recommend significant new funding be authorized for three Learn and Serve America programs:

- Formula funds to states to support service-learning staff housed in State Education Agencies and provide professional development to educators as well as grants to school districts to support local service-learning coordinator positions and where local funds are not available, student-led project implementation costs. (\$50 million in annual appropriations is authorized.)
- Youth Engagement Zones – Grants to create local networks – consisting at least one LEA (school or school district), one community college, and one community-based entity - that engages students in a defined zone (community) in service-learning by including service-learning as a part of the curriculum in all secondary schools served by the participating LEA or engaging at least 90% of students residing in the zone in service-learning activities. (\$20 million in annual appropriations is authorized.)
- Semester of Service and Summer of Service programs, which provide stipends and/or academic credit to students in underserved communities for service-learning that takes place over the course of an academic semester or summer. (Appropriations for \$10 million in grants and \$10 million in education awards are authorized.)

Additionally, we advocate for continued increases in the appropriations for other Corporation for National and Community Service programs that could put a greater emphasis on youth engagement as a priority activity, including AmeriCorps, the Social Innovation Fund, and National Days of Service grants.

Civic engagement, volunteer, or community service programs also exist as standalone programs or as one of a larger set of allowable activities in [several other federal agencies](#),<sup>(5)</sup> including:

- [Department of Education](#)<sup>(6)</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, Mentoring Program, Federal Work-Study Program, Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Federal TRIO Programs, International and Foreign language Education, English Literacy and Civics Program
  - There are also many cross-cutting opportunities in the latest Department of Education authorization bill, the Every Student Succeed Act, that could provide [support to civic engagement activities](#).<sup>(7)</sup>
- Department of Agriculture - 4-H Youth Development, Food and Agriculture Service-Learning Program, and Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR)

- Department of Health and Human Services - Community Coalition Partnerships for the Prevention of Teen, Pregnancy/Capacity Building for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy, National Youth Sports Program (NYSP), Runaway and Homeless Youth - State Collaboration/Demonstration, Grants for Positive Youth Development, Family and Community Violence Prevention Program, Child and Youth Initiative (Indian Health)
- Department of the Interior – Youth Conservation Corps and National Park Service Volunteer Programs, Services to Indian Children, Elderly and Families
- Department of Justice - Developing, Testing and Demonstrating Promising New Programs Community Capacity Development Office (Weed and Seed)
- Department of Labor - Job Corps, Apprenticeship and Training, YouthBuild
- Environmental Protection Agency - Environmental Education Grants

Most of these programs allow service-learning (or similarly named) activities as one of many possible uses, so these agencies also need to prioritize these activities when publishing NOFOs and in their review processes. Additionally, each of these agencies should provide increased training and technical assistance to grantees on these topics.

Phase II: Increase coordination between agencies and between the federal and state and local governments as well as private sector philanthropy and leading nonprofits.

Building on the work of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships as well as previous inter-agency working groups like the [Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs](#)<sup>(8)</sup> and the [President's Task Force on Expanding National Service](#),<sup>(9)</sup> we propose a permanent interagency working group convened by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and co-chaired by CNCS and the Department of Education to implement and expand on the recommendations of the previous working groups, including:

- Coordinate federal agency initiatives, including integrating youth voice, collaborating on sharing training and technical assistance providers and content across programs and coordinating grant-making activities, including the development of a common grant application or multiple agencies funding a joint program (similar to FEMA funding the FEMA Corps AmeriCorps program through CNCS.)
- Coordinate with local governments and government agencies, including state service commissions, cities or counties with Chief Service Officers, and school district administrators.

- Coordinate with the nonprofit and philanthropic community to ensure equitable distribution of programs and resources into communities that need it most.

Phase III: When and where appropriate, pass new legislation to create new requirements or authorize new programs.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is due to be reauthorized (last done in 2009), and the final report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service due in March 2020 – along with many of the 2020 presidential candidates discussing plans for increased national service – may present an opportunity to approach this reauthorization in 2021 and create new programs.

There will need to be more discussion in the field – and collaboration among the volunteer, service-learning, national service, civic engagement, education, and social entrepreneurship fields – to develop a shared agenda instead of presenting multiple agendas that share very similar goals.

**Benefits/Costs**

All communities (states, counties, cities, school districts) and nonprofit organizations would have increased capacity and the financial resources necessary to implement high-quality youth engagement programs, especially in underserved communities. Private sector philanthropic funding would be better leveraged, and proven strategies and programs would be scaled up.

As a result, this should result in increased youth volunteer and voting rates – ideally to 100% over the course of the next 25 years (by the time those who are born in 2020/21 turn 25).

Finally, increasing youth volunteering, service-learning, and/or civic engagement has a triple impact:

- Impact on youth – academic achievement, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills development, connection to community and caring adults, etc.
- Impact on community needs – improvements in issue-specific indicators, the people helped by volunteer activities, and the economic value of increased volunteer hours
- Impact on civic health – increased voting and other civic participation behaviors
  - Increased likelihood of committing to full time national, military, or public service positions.

*What is Required to Implement the Proposal*

Phase I requires no new authorizing legislation. It will require:

- The President recommending appropriations in his/her budget.
- The House and Senate approving increased appropriations in the federal budget. (This may also require an agreement to lift the current budget caps Non-Defense discretionary spending.)

- Departments and agencies prioritizing these activities when developing NOFOs and rubrics as well as when awarding grants.

The cost of Phase I, if both the Volunteer Generation Fund and Learn and Serve America programs were funded at the maximum amount authorized would be an additional \$191,600,000 over FY19 for a total of \$197,000,000 in total appropriations. This cost increases if you include increased appropriations for all other programs referenced to their maximum authorization; authorization amounts for these programs still need to be researched.

While a simplistic calculation that wouldn't necessarily be applicable for all program models, YSA is able to provide volunteer opportunities for youth at the cost of \$4-6/volunteer through our currently-funded CNCS programs. To provide opportunities to all K-12 age students (estimated to be 56.6 million in the 2018-2019 school year), the minimum cost would be \$226.4 million - \$339.6 million. It is certainly feasible to reach this amount when including all already authorized programs listed above.

If you assume similar results to Learn and Serve America, the cost to reach 56.6 million K-12 students could be as high as \$2.04 billion annually across all contributing departments and programs, which may be possible under current authorizations but would likely require increased authorization levels to be passed. Federal funding could (and should) also be supplemented by state and local funding.

#### **References/Resources** (also, cited and linked throughout the proposal)

1. Good Intentions, Gap in Impact  
[https://publicpolicy.umd.edu/sites/default/files/Good%20Intentions%2C%20Gap%20in%20Action\\_Do%20Good%20Institute%20Research%20Brief.pdf](https://publicpolicy.umd.edu/sites/default/files/Good%20Intentions%2C%20Gap%20in%20Action_Do%20Good%20Institute%20Research%20Brief.pdf)
2. CivX Now Policy Agenda:  
<https://www.civxnow.org/policy>
3. National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service Interim Report  
<https://inspire2serve.gov/NCOS%20Interim%20Report.pdf>
4. Education Commission of the States - Service-Learning After Learn and Serve America  
<https://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/02/87/10287.pdf>
5. America's Promise Alliance - Guide to Federal Resources for Youth Development  
[https://ysa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/guide\\_to\\_federal\\_resources.pdf](https://ysa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/guide_to_federal_resources.pdf)
6. U.S. Department of Education - Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action  
<https://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/road-map-call-to-action-accessible.pdf>
7. Every Student Succeeds Act: Mapping Opportunities for Civic Education  
<https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/ESSA-Mapping-opportunities-for-civic-education.pdf>

8. Pathways for Youth: Strategic Plan for Federal Collaboration  
[https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/IWGY-Pathways\\_for\\_Youth.pdf](https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/IWGY-Pathways_for_Youth.pdf)
9. Task Force on Expanding National Service Final Report  
[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Task\\_Force\\_on\\_Expanding\\_National\\_Service\\_Final\\_Report\\_to\\_the\\_President%202015.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Task_Force_on_Expanding_National_Service_Final_Report_to_the_President%202015.pdf)