

1a. Brief History of AmeriCorps and National Service

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, which is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), engages more than 80,000 people in intensive service each year through more than 15,000 nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country. Members help communities tackle pressing problems while mobilizing millions of volunteers for the organizations they serve. They gain valuable professional, educational, and life benefits, and the experience has a lasting impact on the members and communities they serve. AmeriCorps consists of three main programs: AmeriCorps State and National, whose members serve with national and local nonprofit and community groups; AmeriCorps VISTA, through which members serve full-time fighting poverty and the roots of poverty; and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), a team-based residential program for young adults 18-24 who carry out projects in public safety, the environment, youth development, and disaster relief and preparedness.

National Service

During the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. Four million young people joined in response to his call to service, restoring the nation's parks, revitalizing the economy, and supporting their families.

During the 1940s, the GI Bill linked wartime service to educational benefits, offering returning World War II veterans the opportunity to pursue higher education in partial compensation for service to their country.

In the 1960s the call to service came from President John F. Kennedy, who challenged Americans in his inaugural address "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." In response to this challenge, the Peace Corps was born.

President Lyndon B. Johnson brought the spirit of the Peace Corps home to America by creating Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in 1964. VISTA, which is now part of AmeriCorps, continues to fund programs under the sponsorship of local public agencies or nonprofit organizations to improve the condition of people living in under-served, low-income communities throughout America. Other initiatives such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Corps (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program were developed to engage older Americans in the work of improving the nation.

In 1970, Congress created the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a summer environmental employment program for youth ages 15-18. YCC no longer exists, but some components remain active in several states. In 1976, California became the first state to create its own youth conservation program, the California Conservation Corps. Now there are Conservation Corps programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Private funders helped create additional

youth corps programs during the seventies, including the Youth Volunteer Corps of America, City Year, and YouthBuild.

President George H. W. Bush revived interest in national service. In 1990 Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which created a Commission on National and Community Service and sought to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States.” Full implementation began in 1992, when the commission awarded \$64 million in grants to support four broad types of state and local community service efforts.

President Bill Clinton sponsored the National and Community Service Trust Act, a revision of the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which was passed by a bipartisan coalition of Members of Congress and signed into law on September 21, 1993. The legislation created a new federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), to administer federally funded national service programs. The law created AmeriCorps, which was designed to support local, state, and national organizations across the nation that involve Americans in results-driven community service.

In his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush called on all Americans to serve their country for the equivalent of two years. A coordinating council housed at the White House and chaired by the President worked to expand and strengthen federal service programs like the Peace Corps, Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps, and to raise awareness of, and break down barriers, to service opportunities with all federal government agencies.

President Barack Obama also supported national service with the call “United We Serve.” He worked with Congress to pass the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009. In 2013, he created the Task Force for Expanding National Service to engage more Americans in results-driven service; expand economic and educational opportunities for those who serve; enhance federal agencies’ capacity to achieve their missions and more efficiently use tax dollars; and build the pipeline of Americans ready to enter public service. In total, more than \$194 million was invested in this approach resulting in 10,000 new AmeriCorps positions.