

PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND OPPORTUNITY THROUGH NATIONAL SERVICE ACT

Background: The United States has a strong history of citizen response to national calls to service in times of crisis. More than eighty years ago, our nation rose to the challenge of the Great Depression with the creation of citizen service programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. Millions of participants benefitted from paid employment and opportunities to develop skills while constructing national parks and public lands infrastructure and producing cultural works still enjoyed generations later. Through decades of bipartisan evolution, today's national service programs carry on that legacy.

National service programs, administered through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), provide services in critical need during the COVID-19 response and recovery. Those programs, including AmeriCorps, the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, and Senior Corps, should be expanded to meet the needs of this moment. To safely reopen our country, a massive effort is needed to test millions and to trace contacts of those who are or may be infected. To recover, we also need meaningful employment opportunities and a significant expansion of the human capital working to address community and conservation needs. National service presents a unique opportunity for flexible, locally driven responses to meet public health, employment, and recovery necessities.

Legislation:

- Fund 750,000 national service positions over a three-year response and recovery period, in part to meet the projected need for as many as 300,000 public health workers.
- Create a partnership between AmeriCorps and CDC inspired by FEMA Corps to provide for additional response surge capacity that could be deployed to specific areas as needed.
- Provide flexibilities for programs quickly to grow and respond to dynamic local recovery needs.
- Prioritize funding for activities directly related to our response and recovery, such as:
 - Public health services,
 - Emergency logistics,
 - Workforce and reemployment services,
 - Education support (including for adult learners), and
 - Services that combat nutrition insecurity.
- Ensure that individuals' financial resources do not limit participation by increasing the AmeriCorps living allowance to 175 percent of the federal poverty line and tying the value of the Segal Education Award to the cost of two years of public university tuition, harmonizing the treatment of both with other programs by making them nontaxable.
- Fund new online tools for Senior Corps to safely move to a teleservice model.
- Extend priority enrollment to Peace Corps, U.S. Fulbright, and AmeriCorps participants whose service or grants was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and encourage participation by members of low-income and minority communities, those who have had contact with the juvenile justice system, and those of diverse abilities.
- Invite participation by a diverse range of Americans by launching an awareness and outreach campaign on response service opportunities and supporting the Volunteer Generation Fund.