

Chapter 4 – National Service Overview

Introduction & History

When faced with challenges, our nation has always relied on the dedication and action of its citizens. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) carries on a long tradition of citizen involvement by providing opportunities for Americans of all ages to improve their communities through service. To learn more, go to: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/> or <http://www.serve.gov>

The Civilian Conservation Corps

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, 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 and themselves. For 11 years the Civilian Conservation Corps provided billions of dollars in services and enabled millions of families to live in dignity.

The GI Bill

During the 1940's, 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. Veterans improved their own lives by attending college. They also contributed mightily to America's future. With the education they received, those citizens helped spark the economic boom that helped make America the world's leading economy.

Peace Corps

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. The Peace Corps continues to engage thousands of volunteers who travel the world far and wide, building schools where none existed, helping farmers provide food for the hungry, and creating hospitals to care for the sick. After returning from overseas, Peace Corps volunteers put their new knowledge of others to work at home, in the spirit of citizenship, changing America for the better. To learn more, go to: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/>

The War on Poverty

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 in order to engage older Americans in the work of improving the nation.

Revival of Interest National and Community Service

President George H. W. Bush helped spark a revival of interest in national service when he instituted the White House Office of National Service in 1989. In 1990 Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which created a Commission on National and Community Service whose mission was 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. These initiatives were the Serve-America programs (known as Learn and Serve) which involved school-aged youth in community service and service-learning through a variety of school and community-based activities; Higher Education Innovative Projects aimed at involving college students in community service and at promoting community service at educational institutions; American Conservation and Youth Service Corps, supporting summer and year-round youth corps initiatives that engage both in- and out-of-school youth in community service work; and the National and Community Service Demonstration Models, for programs that were potential models for large-scale national service. The National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), a demonstration program to help solve problems here at home, was enacted later as part of the 1993 Defense Authorization Act. It is a residential service program modeled on the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States military.

National and Community Service Trust Act

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, involves Americans in results-driven community service. The legislation drew on the principles of both the Civilian Conservation Corps and the GI Bill, encouraging Americans to serve and rewarding those who do. The new agency also took over management of the programs of two previous agencies, ACTION, which was responsible for running VISTA and the National Senior Service Corps programs, and the more recent Commission on National and Community Service, including the NCCC, forming a new network of national service programs.

Service in the New Millennium

President George W. Bush called on all Americans to serve their country for the equivalent of two years and announced the creation of the USA Freedom Corps, an umbrella network for volunteerism. 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 within all federal government agencies.

The Serve America Act

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The Serve America Act reauthorized and expanded national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service by amending the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

Organizational Structure

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

Created in 1993, The Corporation for National and Community Service is the largest grant making organization for service and volunteerism in the country. An agency of the federal government, in addition to AmeriCorps which is administered in Nebraska by ServeNebraska, the Corporation provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through these programs:

- AmeriCorps – whose members serve with local and national organization to meet community needs and after service receive education awards to help finance college or training (AmeriCorps*State and National, AmeriCorps*VISTA and AmeriCorps*NCCC); &
- Senior Corps, through which Americans 55 and older contribute their skills and experience (RSVP, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions)

AmeriCorps operates in a decentralized manner that gives a significant amount of administrative responsibility to states, national and local nonprofit groups. CNCS realizes that the many organizations and individuals around the country with which it shares administrative responsibility for AmeriCorps will look to it for assistance on a broad range of issues and problems.

The following table suggests some of the principal support functions that the CNCS office can provide to assist AmeriCorps:

OFFICE	AmeriCorps SUPPORT FUNCTIONS
Program	Oversees programmatic aspects of grants and awards. Program officers serve as the primary liaisons with state service commission and the National Program grantees.
Grants	Oversees financial aspects of grants and awards.
Office of Leadership Development and Training	Works with national technical assistance providers and with training and technical assistance coordinators in state service commissions.
Trust	Manages the education awards for AmeriCorps members.
Public Affairs	Oversees media relations, marketing and publications, including the online recruitment website.
Public Liaison	Oversees national initiatives, national service days, and all AmeriCorps awards.
General Counsel	Provides legal counsel for CNCS and can answer legal questions related to AmeriCorps program management.
Office of the Inspector General	Detects and deters waste, fraud, abuse, and violations of law of CNCS funded programs.

CNCS State Offices

CNCS also operates offices in each state. These offices are responsible for administering AmeriCorps*VISTA projects as well as the three Senior Corps programs. The state office director usually serves as an ex-officio member of the State Service Commission. For a list of CNCS State officers and contact information, please go to: <http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp> . A listing of Nebraska AmeriCorps*VISTA and Senior Corps programming can be found under the National Services Partners section of the ServeNebraska website.