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### *A Frontline View*

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**W**hen President Bush challenged Americans in early 2002 to devote at least 4,000 hours of their lives to volunteering, the horrors of 9/11 were still fresh in our minds. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2002, some 59.8 million of us answered his call and volunteered with nonprofit organizations. A year later, the number jumped to 63.8 million, and in 2004, it rose yet again, to 64.5 million.

This sustained climb in volunteerism is extremely unusual; all comparable increases that preceded it faded after months. Indeed, we have not had a similar opportunity to expand civic engagement in our communities since Pearl Harbor. All Americans have a duty to support this upward trend. Likewise, we at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) have a duty to ensure that our programs—AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America—amplify the president’s challenge to us all to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility across America.

## STRENGTHENING BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

In the 1990s, our programs, especially AmeriCorps, were caught in some of the hottest partisan crossfire in Washington. Today, they enjoy strong bipartisan support in both houses of Congress and have virtually every governor's enthusiastic backing. The corporation received a 20 percent funding increase in fiscal 2004, including a remarkable 40 percent increase for AmeriCorps that allowed us to support a record 75,000 AmeriCorps members. Although our fiscal 2005 budget provides support for slightly fewer participants, we clearly are holding our own in very difficult budgetary times, thanks in no small part to the president's steadfast commitment to national service and to our friends in Congress, many of whom are members of the newly formed National Service Caucus.

Still, a small but influential group of national lawmakers remains skeptical of AmeriCorps. We want to earn their trust and hope to do so by recommitting ourselves to the community-based nature of AmeriCorps. We are working hard to enhance its value to each state's gubernatorially appointed service commission. We will also spread a more compelling message about using federal dollars to leverage volunteerism at the grassroots level; issue rules that respond to congressional calls for reform; and administer our programs with the highest level of fiscal and operational integrity.

## GETTING OUR HOUSE BACK IN ORDER

2002 and 2003 were bruising years for the corporation. Financial and operational problems eroded our credibility with our grantees, with Congress, and even with employees. We responded by launching significant management and operational reforms designed to get our house back in order.

The corporation has created new standards of fiscal integrity and restructured many of its operations and practices, from how we review grants to how we evaluate our supervisors. We have placed

an overarching emphasis on strengthening relationships with our core customers, the grantees who operate national service programs, and those programs' participants. Our congressional and executive branch overseers agree that these changes have put us back on the right track. Many of the reforms we implemented will take hold during the course of 2005, freeing us to concentrate on the development of a strategic vision for national service for the next five years.

## STRENGTHENING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING

National service grows stronger when it uses its participants to recruit, train, and manage other community volunteers. For example, in 2003, some 450 AmeriCorps members working with Habitat for Humanity recruited, trained, or supervised more than 150,000 other volunteers, multiplying their impact more than 300 times.

Similarly, in 2004, Florida's state service commission and national service participants mobilized and coordinated more than 140,000 volunteers in response to a series of hurricanes that devastated Florida and other Southeastern states. Those volunteers performed 6 million hours of service—the largest volunteer disaster-recovery effort in U.S. history, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Even AmeriCorps members who primarily do hands-on service frequently mobilize volunteers. For example, in 2004, although the 700 AmeriCorps members in City Year provided largely education services, they nevertheless were able to mobilize more than 50,000 volunteers to support their work.

National service can add real value by focusing on mobilization. From a study that the corporation co-sponsored last year with the USA Freedom Corps, the UPS Foundation, and the Urban Institute, we know that most charities would love to have a full-time staff member devoted to volunteer management but cannot afford one. National service, and AmeriCorps in particular, is uniquely situated

to fill this gap and increasingly will do so over the next decade. The corporation and its partners in the states will strengthen ties to organizations such as Volunteer Centers, Hands On Network, and many local United Way chapters dedicated to increasing volunteerism and matching volunteers to local needs.

### **LEVERAGING FEDERAL DOLLARS TO MAKE PROGRAMS MORE SUSTAINABLE**

Using federal dollars to generate more local spending is critical to AmeriCorps' success. A decade of experience has taught us that a local program's success at raising funds to match its federal grant is a key measure of its strength and long-term viability. Over the past four years, CNCS grantees have raised nearly \$1.5 billion in matching funds, or about \$360 million a year, to support their national service programs. That nonfederal revenue stream adds a critical element of sustainability to their programs.

Matching grants are just one of the ways the corporation uses its leverage to make grassroots programs more viable over the long term. Using service workers to mobilize other volunteers, as discussed, is a prime example. The degree to which local groups assume responsibility for community resources that service participants create, build, or renovate is another, as is the extent to which service participants continue to improve their communities after participating in AmeriCorps or other service programs.

CNCS will soon issue final AmeriCorps rules that will raise the leveraging power of federally supported service to another level. They have been the subject of considerable attention and public comment. We understand that no one is pleased to have to contribute more in order to receive the same benefit. However, we hope that AmeriCorps grantees will agree that we listened and worked hard to respond to their concerns. In particular, we have tried hard to respond to the fears of groups working in economically distressed communities and to recognize sustainability indicators that go beyond financial matching.

### **EXPANDING THE “PIPELINE EFFECTS”**

In December 2004, the corporation released the initial findings of a groundbreaking study of how serving in AmeriCorps influences former members' civic attitudes and behaviors later in their lives. This scientifically rigorous study, entitled *Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in AmeriCorps*, clearly tells us that people who take the AmeriCorps pledge and fulfill their year of service become more engaged citizens than they would have been had they not participated in AmeriCorps. They have a greater sense of connection to their community, more knowledge of its problems, a heightened sense of community obligation, and a greater likelihood of working on its behalf.

One finding leaped off the pages for those of us concerned about future leadership in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Three years after the baseline survey was conducted, former AmeriCorps members were far more likely than their counterparts to be employed in the public service sector, including teaching, public safety, social work, and full-time military service. We also know that AmeriCorps contributes more entry- and mid-level employees to social-service nonprofits than any other comparable institution.

The corporation will look for ways to improve this employment pipeline. For example, we have no system for informing graduating AmeriCorps members about potential job opportunities in the public sector. And on the front end of the pipeline, we are not doing a sufficient job of helping student participants in our Learn and Serve America programs understand opportunities available through AmeriCorps, VISTA, NCCC, or the Peace Corps.

### **BUILDING HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RETIRING BABY BOOMERS**

In the coming two decades, some 77 million baby boomers will reach retirement age. At the same time, the number of frail and elderly people needing long-term care will rise by 30 percent and more.

We believe that baby boomers represent a vast potential pool of talented, active, and caring volunteers, capable of addressing a wide range of societal needs, including elder care. With more than 30 years of experience recruiting and placing senior volunteers, Senior Corps will lead our effort in this area. Our AmeriCorps programs will also be put to the test of engaging these retirees. Is a retired teacher professional corps a good business model? What about retired health-care and social workers? Is it feasible and advisable to make education awards more attractive to older Americans by allowing them to transfer the benefits to their children?

These are tough questions, but the corporation will work hard to adapt America's national service infrastructure to welcome this new group to service.

### **BOLSTERING PARTNERSHIPS**

Although the corporation has made progress in forming partnerships with nongovernment institutions, we believe we can do far more to align our grantees' and service participants' needs with resources from the business, foundation, and education communities.

As we develop our five-year strategic plan, we will engage these partners in the public comment period and ensure that the final plan supports stronger integration of these sectors.

The corporation will work especially hard in 2005 to align our AmeriCorps programs more closely with institutions of higher education. Since 1994, AmeriCorps members have earned more than \$1 billion in college scholarships and student loan repayments, but we are not leveraging those funds as best we can to enhance and improve service. We need to begin discussions with our partners in higher education about matching awards from universities, using federal work-study college aid for service, offering college credit for service, and integrating service learning into the college curriculum. We expect to make a hard run at some of those issues this year.

After a decade of growth and experience, AmeriCorps is just beginning to hit its stride in terms of administration and effective deploy-

ment of resources. Learn and Serve America continues to create opportunities for millions of young people to develop a lifelong ethic of service and civic participation. And Senior Corps brings to the table more than 35 years of experience in engaging older Americans in community service. If we work together to leverage each of these programs' strengths, we can take advantage of this rare window of opportunity to sustain and, it is hoped, expand volunteerism and civic engagement in America.