



National Service Hearing: Improving Current National Service Policies and Processes

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This transcript was prepared by official military court reporters based on an audio recording of the hearing.

Commission:

- The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck, Chairman
- The Honorable Mark Gearan, Vice Chair for National and Public Service
- The Honorable Debra Wada, Vice Chair for Military Service
- The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson, Commissioner
- The Honorable Avril Haines, Commissioner
- Ms. Jeanette James, Commissioner
- Mr. Alan Khazei, Commissioner
- Mr. Tom Kilgannon, Commissioner
- Ms. Shawn Skelly, Commissioner

Panelists:

- Ms. Michelle K. Brooks, Chief of Staff, Peace Corps
- Mr. Chris Bugbee, Chief Operating Officer, OneStar Foundation
- Ms. AnnMaura Connolly, President for Voices for National Service and Chief Strategy Officer and Executive Vice President of City Year, Inc.
- Mr. Pierre Nguyen, Disaster Response Programs Manager, Texas Conservation Corps of American YouthWorks
- Ms. Barbara Stewart, CEO, Corporation for National and Community Service



OPENING STATEMENTS

Dr. Joseph Heck

Welcome to the third hearing of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service. Thank you for being here today or for tuning in via our Facebook channel.

Today the commission meets to discuss the current national service system in America. Our distinguished panel will address the challenges of the current system and discuss options to improve policies, processes and programming.

For clarification, this hearing is focused on the current national service system. The afternoon hearing, which I hope you will again join us, will discuss how we can create more national service opportunities.

National service is defined in the commission's mandate as civilian participation in any nongovernmental capacity, including private, for profit, nonprofit and faith based organizations, that pursues and enhances the common good and meets the needs of communities, the states or the nation in sectors related to security, healthcare for the elderly, and other areas considered appropriate by the commission.

This includes programs such as Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and YouthBuild. We are here to explore in greater depth how to increase aspiration for, awareness of and access to national service programs.

Given the American system of national service is complex and decentralized, many Americans do not understand national service and are unfamiliar with the numerous options to participate in a national service opportunity.

A study commissioned by Service Year Alliance in 2015 demonstrated that fewer than one and one third of 14 to 24-year olds are aware of Service Year options.



As we ensure aspiration and awareness, we also must ensure access to national service available to all Americans by addressing barriers such as the limited compensation and benefits.

Access also includes expanding the demographic representation of national service volunteers and members so that it truly is reflective of America. In 2015, nearly a third of Americans, 62.6 million, said they volunteered in their community through an organization.

While many Americans are inspired to serve their communities, they are also unaware of how participation in national service programs can, for example, build skills, assist with career opportunities, keep individuals healthy, and strengthen communities.

National service programs provide a platform for Americans who aspire to serve the country in a dedicated and short-term capacity.

The goal of this hearing is to hear from experts on how to ensure the national service system is the best it can be. I hope our panel will address these issues as directly as possible in their oral statements and in their responses to commissioners' questions.

So, let me welcome our panelists. Michelle Brooks, Chief of Staff of the Peace Corps; Chris Bugbee, Chief Operating Officer of the OneStar Foundation; AnnMaura Connolly, President for Voices for National Service and Chief Strategy Officer and Executive Vice President of City Year Incorporated; Pierre Nguyen, Disaster Response Program Manager for the Texas Conservation Corps, a program of American YouthWorks; and Barbara Stewart, Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Thank you all for joining us here today.

I would now like to yield to the vice chair for National and Public Service, Mr. Mark Gearan, for an opening statement.



Mr. Mark Gearan

Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning and welcome, everyone, and a special thanks and welcome to our panelists here. We are thrilled to be here at The Bush School of Government. There could not be a more appropriate place or more important time to consider the issues that we're talking about.

I come to this conversation as vice chair, as a former director of the Peace Corps, and having had the good fortune in that assignment, and also to serve as the chair of the Corporation for National and Community Service. So, these are topics that are close and dear to all of our hearts here, and I thank all the panelists for all of your work for the common purpose and the collective good that all your programs evidence, and we thank you for your participation today.

I would also say thank you to the university here. As a former college president, I met with the student newspaper this morning, and we had some opportunities to meet with students last night at The Bush School and Texas A&M generally.

What's coming up this weekend is a very significant statement about Texas A&M, the big event that's gone on for many years, where students together give back to the community that has been the very warm and hospitable host to the university for many years. So, we admire that kind of engagement and service and commitment, and finally, as I said, to be here at The Bush School.

I'm currently at the Harvard Kennedy School and have a sense of the importance of graduate programs like this with names and legacies that bear the mark of service, and President Bush and Mrs. Bush certainly evidenced that in their presidency and post presidency with the Points of Light Foundation, a board that I was privileged to serve on.

So, for all those reasons, we are very grateful for the hospitality that has been extended to us, very grateful for your journey here to testify and to present your testimony before us, and I'm very much looking forward to the conversation and appreciate the opportunity with all my



commissioners to say thank you to the students here and the volunteers, both current and returned who have served in a variety of different streams of service. So, we thank you for your service and the commitment that you've made at this important stage in America's civic life.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you, Mark.

So, before we begin, let me explain how we will conduct today's hearing. The commissioners have all received your written testimony, some of which was quite comprehensive, and it will be entered into the official record. We ask that you summarize the highlights of that testimony in the allotted five minutes, so just speak to us from the heart about the programs you're representing.

Before you, you will see our timing system. When the light turns yellow, you have approximately one-minute remaining; and when it turns red, your time has expired.

After all testimony is completed, we will move into questions from the commissioners. Each commissioner will be given five minutes to ask a question and receive a response. And as the commissioners well know, while I am reluctant to gavel down a panelist, I am not that reluctant to gavel down a commissioner.

[Laughter.]

Depending on time, we will proceed with one and possibly two rounds of questions. Upon completion of commissioner questioning, we will provide an opportunity for members of the public who are in attendance to offer comments, either on the specific topics addressed today



or more generally on the commission's overarching mandate. These comments will be limited to two minutes. The light will turn yellow when you have 30 seconds remaining and red when time has expired.

We are now ready to begin with our panelists' testimony. I'd like to begin with Michelle Brooks, Chief of Staff of the Peace Corps. Ms. Brooks, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

Thank you.

Good morning. I first would like to thank Chairman Heck, Vice Chairs Gearan and Wada, and the other members of the commission for the invitation to speak with you today. We commend the work of the commission.

At the Peace Corps we believe that federal investments in programs like the Peace Corps and the Corporation for National and Community Service result in passionate and informed global citizens.

The Peace Corps was established in 1961 as an innovative, bold experiment. Today, more than 235,000 returned Peace Corps volunteers, or RPCVs, demonstrate the enduring strength of our mission.

The mission and three goals of the Peace Corps over the last 58 years has not changed. The mission, to promote world peace and friendship; and our goals, to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women, to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served, and to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Our agency remains an active partner in a number of whole of government initiatives such as PEPFAR, Feed the Future, the President's Malaria Initiative, and the newly launched Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative. Volunteers work with local partners on



health, agriculture, education, environment, economic development, and youth programs. Volunteers contribute toward reducing incidences of disease, increased livelihoods and advanced opportunity for women's and girls' education.

After service, Peace Corps volunteers play key leadership roles in international development and domestic and foreign policy. They serve in Congress, on city councils, and as ambassadors. They lead public health and development initiatives at CDC or USAID, or are now lawyers, doctors, artists and teachers throughout the United States. They were trained and shaped in part by their Peace Corps service.

Such domestic dividends are not considered by many who look at the Peace Corps model. That should change. We are currently working on ways to document the contributions of our large RPCV community.

Volunteers return to the U.S. with a deep understanding of other cultures and customs. They've learned adaptability and developed significant problem-solving skills. They've achieved professional level language skills which they can offer to future employers across the United States. In short, this is an investment of taxpayer dollars with an incredible return on investment.

We believe there are steps which can be taken that would strengthen not only the Peace Corps model but those of other service organizations. We therefore recommend the following for the commission's consideration:

Extend noncompetitive eligibility (NCE) status to three years for returned Peace Corps volunteers, bringing it in line with most other authorities granting NCE status. The details related to the implementation of the NCE status should be clear and implemented consistently across federal agencies. This would result in a significant effort to promote the use of NCE for Peace Corps service and other service agencies.



Second, increase the use of national service designations on employment applications. Although the employers of national service initiative have been an exciting start, we recommend an increase in these designations.

Support the expansion of loan forgiveness for Peace Corps volunteers and other service members. Funding for this effort would be a challenge for many institutions, so consideration should be given to a unified and centralized approach.

Lastly, support for federal employees across agencies who have indicated an interest in providing short term technical support to Peace Corps programs. This could prove incredibly beneficial to the Peace Corps and a reenergized public sector. We would like to recommend a policy to grant reemployment rights to federal employees who separate from federal service to serve on short term assignments as volunteers. We would request OPM guidance on service deployments that would not result in the loss of benefits or out of pocket expenses.

In conclusion, the Peace Corps is committed to quality service opportunities around the world and to promoting the domestic dividend of all national service. We look forward to continuing our work with the commission, and we thank you for your time and consideration today.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you, Ms. Brooks. You've set the bar perfectly for your fellow panelists.

Mr. Bugbee, you're recognized for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Thank you.



Mr. Chairman and members of the commission, I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify today. And as a graduate of The Bush School, I think this venue is perfect for this hearing and kind of continuing with the legacy of President Bush.

OneStar National Service Commission is one of 52 state service commissions charged with strengthening local communities through service and volunteering. In Texas, we administer an \$18.2 million portfolio of 29 AmeriCorps programs with over 3,200 AmeriCorps members that address the needs of Texans in the area of disaster services, economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship and healthy futures. In addition, OneStar operates a statewide AmeriCorps VISTA Intermediary Project, the Rebuild Texas Fund for disaster relief, and fills key roles in disaster services throughout the state.

The interim report published by the commission notes that national service is America's best kept secret, and we couldn't agree more. At OneStar we have seen the substantial impact of national service and believe in the power of service to transform lives.

In Texas, 3.7 million hours of service are being contributed by AmeriCorps members this year alone. \$12.9 million in education awards are being earned by AmeriCorps members who finish a year of service. 479 nonprofit schools and partner sites across the state are directly benefiting from AmeriCorps Texas, and over 100,000 economically disadvantaged children or children with special or exceptional needs will be served by AmeriCorps Texas programs.

We also agree that there are significant barriers in realizing the full potential of national service in this country and hope the work of the commission can help bring about helpful policy changes to remedy this.

OneStar supports the CNCS transformation and sustainability plan, and we appreciate Barbara Stewart and her team as they have taken steps to improve the grant process and reduce barriers to administering AmeriCorps grants.



While AmeriCorps is an impactful federal program, we know AmeriCorps grants are one of the most complex federal grants to administer, creating a major challenge in growing national service in Texas. It has become nearly impossible for smaller nonprofits and organizations to competitively apply for and be awarded an AmeriCorps grant. This is especially true for rural and small faith-based organizations that struggle with matching requirements as well as administrative hurdles, effectively driving national service resources to urban centers.

We need to simply and streamline national service grant programs to ease the burden of grant management and increase access for a wider variety of organizations, including continuing to expand a fixed amount of grant awards and increase flexibility with using unexpended formula grant funds.

We fully support increasing the living allowance to increase access and equity among those able to take advantage of national service opportunities. We believe this should also include a corresponding increase to grant awards to avoid placing the full burden of increases on organizations managing an AmeriCorps program.

OneStar also believes part time service opportunities are an integral part of developing a pipeline of AmeriCorps members that are likely to serve multiple terms. Current policies limit terms of service for AmeriCorps state and national members. With a limit of four terms, regardless of part time or full-time status, members can easily reach their maximum allowable terms while still enrolled as college students and lose their eligibility to serve in a full-time position upon graduation.

My written testimony includes further context for some of the policy options already under consideration as well as additional items based on some barriers OneStar has identified through our work in Texas.

OneStar remains committed to supporting the commission throughout this process, and I encourage your team to continue to seek input from state service commissions as we are



collectively responsible for administering 80% of AmeriCorps' state and national funding and are key partners with CNCS in grant making and administration of national service programs.

I'm grateful to the commission and each of you for your public service as you develop recommendations that will encourage every American to be inspired and eager to serve, building on a legacy of strengthening our American democracy through service. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you very much, Mr. Bugbee.

Ms. Connolly, you are recognized.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

Good morning. Chairman Heck and distinguished members of the commission, thank you for inviting me to testify and to be with you all today and for your public service on this commission. I actually got my start in this work as a Jesuit volunteer and have been working ever since to try to expand and strengthen opportunities for young people, particularly to serve.

Voices for National Service is a coalition of national, state and local service organizations committed to expanding national service. We work together to build the case for the federal investment. We conduct research on the benefits and the impact of national service, and we build the capacity of the service community to educate our nation's leaders, and we mobilize folks when we need to fight for increased investment.

City Year, my other hat, brings together diverse talented teams of young adults to serve in high need schools in 29 U.S. cities where they support students, teachers and schools all day, every day.



Despite the strong history of impact and recent improvements to make national service delivery more flexible, efficient and accountable, there are ways that the current system can be updated to allow organizations to spend less time on burdensome administrative requirements and more time on delivering high quality service and developing those who serve.

Our first recommendation is that AmeriCorps simplify match reporting requirements. After more than 25 years, it has become clear that the basic operating requirements of an AmeriCorps program include costs beyond the federal grant funding provided by CNCS. CNCS should require programs to report on match funding amounts and their source but not have to maintain auditable documentation.

Second, CNCS should expand fixed amount grants and incentivize programs to use them. Fixed amount grants are much easier to administer. Programs are not required to submit budgets or financial reports, and they draw down funds based on the hours served by active members.

The current system creates significant financial risks for programs that have a reasonable amount of attrition and unfairly disadvantages programs that engage opportunity youth because it places pressure on programs to retain their members for as long as possible, even when a person may not be a good fit or when they get a job, which in some cases is a goal of the program in which they are serving. CNCS should set a standard, reasonable percentage of attrition which can be adjusted for programs that engage opportunity youth.

Third, the corporation should pilot pay for performance to address the unpredictability of grant amounts for programs with track records of achieving results. In every grant cycle, quality AmeriCorps programs are defunded because overall funding has not been significantly increased and other programs have taken precedence either because of a change in national priorities or program growth that happens to be funded during the same competitive grant cycle. CNCS should launch a pilot to enable programs to seek a longer-term funding option that would limit year to year fluctuations in grant funding.



Fourth, CNCS should provide additional resources for programs that engage people living in rural areas, people with disabilities, and opportunity youth, as well as programs that have higher costs because of more complex models.

Some Americans may need additional supports to help them serve successfully, and some programs may be more expensive to run because of significant training and oversight requirements. CNCS should standardize criteria to provide a higher cost per member rate for programs operating in these areas and reduce the match requirements proportionately.

Fifth, the corporation should ensure that those who serve, especially those living in high cost communities, are provided a living allowance sufficient to meet the cost of living and secure housing. Ultimately, CNCS should develop a model that aligns to criteria based on local cost of living, availability of philanthropic dollars, the demographic of those recruited, program objectives, and return on investment.

The tax on the AmeriCorps Education Award should be eliminated, as was proposed by Senators Bennet and Isakson and Congressman Lewis in their bills which were introduced in the last Congress.

We should also look for more ways to make a year of service more doable, including asking public transit systems to offer free transportation to AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members during their term, extending the AmeriCorps VISTA relocation assistance benefit to all AmeriCorps members, and developing pilot programs to address the housing challenge.

There is more work to be done to create a culture of service in America. Employers of national service should be strengthened and expanded, and we should create a new Universities of National Service to encourage universities to give preference to those who serve and promote a year of national service before, during or after matriculation.

To address the issue that too few Americans know about civilian national service, CNCS should work with all branches of the U.S. military to create connective tissue between military



and civilian national service organizations. If every young person turned away from military service were directed to a civilian service option, many more would have the opportunity to serve their country.

There are many ways this could be done, including promoting national service at recruiting stations, in communications to selective service system registrants, and through partnerships. We should also tap the patriotism and experience of veterans to create pathways for them to transition from military to civilian life by offering them the opportunity to continue serving their country through AmeriCorps or Senior Corps.

Today, 75,000 people serve through AmeriCorps, just over 220,000 through Senior Corps, and over 7,300 through the Peace Corps. That is progress, but it's not enough. We should not rest until every person in this country is challenged and given the opportunity to serve.

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you, Ms. Connolly.

Mr. Nguyen?

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

Chairman Heck, members of the commission, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It is my honor and privilege to talk amongst you about improving national service opportunities and looking at our current national service model.

I am a two term AmeriCorps alum, first in 2010 for the Red Cross, as their disaster preparedness educator, and again in 2013 with NCCC FEMA Corps as a team leader. Both experiences led me to my current service capacity as a disaster response program manager for the Texas Conservation Corps of American YouthWorks based in Austin, Texas.



American YouthWorks was founded in 1975 and provides youth and young adults the resources to realize their full potential and effect positive change in their community. Through our innovative education, leadership training and service programming, students and participants are able to access tools instrumental to transforming their lives.

In addition to my program, there are 130 plus corps across the country engaging AmeriCorps members in conservation, maintaining public lands, infrastructure, wildfire remediation, disaster response, and supporting resiliency and economic development needs in communities.

Corps have a rich lineage of national service traced back to the Civilian Conservation Corps, what many consider the first national service program, created by President Roosevelt's New Deal.

Being the son of refugees of the Vietnam War, I was encouraged to pursue a traditional or reputable career path, to become a doctor, a lawyer, et cetera. Fleeing from a country torn apart by civil war, my parents naturally had a different perception of government and the military, so public service was not really something that they had encouraged me to explore. In fact, I was unaware of opportunities with AmeriCorps and some of the other opportunities that were available to me after high school.

Despite that, I was able to gain some of that work experience and skills after I discovered AmeriCorps. I had the opportunity to work with and volunteer with several service-based programs, including the Red Cross, All Hands volunteers, Team Rubicon, and various other disaster relief organizations. And in my current role, I am able to work with other young people to inspire the next generation of change makers.

Service programs provide exposure to people from different backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses and race. Conflict resolution becomes paramount to the success of the program, and one



must learn to quickly adapt to challenging circumstances and work together to accomplish a goal, not against one another.

Service experiences expedite the maturation process, and corps members are forced to approach uncomfortable moments and resolve conflict because they are living, working and sleeping with each other for months.

As a second generation Asian American, I struggled a lot with communication. I never considered myself a leader. Some of this was a product of the Asian culture. You're taught to respect your elders. There's a sense of inferiority that you feel. So, my service really facilitated my growth as a leader, far more than if I was just going to work a 9:00 to 5:00 job, because it forced me out of my comfort zone. I had to live and breathe and sleep with the members that I was serving with, and it made me face uncomfortable situations directly.

As an AmeriCorps alum and current manager of a service program, I wanted to share some of the successes and challenges I've learned over nearly a decade of involvement within the national service community.

National service has a branding and marketing problem. The totality of benefits of services are not well known to the population and stand to benefit most in some cases. For someone like me who was not a strong academic, I found it hard to muster the motivation and drive to complete my education, and understanding that there are more than one or two pathways to success would have helped foster my sense of purpose beyond the necessity of making a living and to support myself and my family.

I recommend more consistent branding of national service as a pathway with short- and long-term benefits and working to instill the same reverence that is associated with the military or obtaining a college degree and fostering a culture that values service will only lead to more considering service as a viable option.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Okay. Do you have more?

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I do.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

After completing my terms of service, I was able to earn an educational award and was disappointed to find the value diminished significantly.

For those who choose service as a means to help pay for school, the tax burden on the education award is significant. Additionally, to ensure maximum flexibility, use of the educational award should be expanded to shorter term programs that offer industry recognized credentials, an entry point to a career path.

My various service positions have taken me all across the country and proved that there is no shortage of work to be done. Service programs are a necessary means of accomplishing this work, and we must remain focused on aligning these programs to address the unmet project and human needs in our communities.

There is much that can be done to strengthen and create service opportunities for all Americans, for all walks of life.

Thank you again for letting me be here and be able to testify in front of this commission.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you, Mr. Nguyen.

Ms. Stewart, you're recognized for four minutes because I'm docking all of you. No, I'm kidding.

[Laughter.]

Ms. Barbara Stewart

That's all right. He had a lot of good things to say. So, thank you, Pierre.

Good morning, Chairman, Vice Chairmen, members of the commission. Thank you for inviting me here this morning to discuss the contributions of national service members, their impact on critical challenges, and the ways to strengthen national service.

As the federal agency for service and volunteering, we share your vision of inspiring and encouraging more Americans to serve, and we're grateful for your dedication to this important assignment.

We're delighted you've had the chance to see national service firsthand and meet many AmeriCorps members, Senior Corps volunteers, and nonprofit partners in your travels around the country.

Let me briefly describe our work and priorities. For the past 25 years, CNCS has mobilized citizens of all ages and backgrounds to improve lives, expand opportunities, strengthen communities, and unite our nation.

Today, 300,000 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members volunteer and serve in 50,000 locations across the country. These dedicated Americans meet local needs and administration



priorities to combat the opioid crisis, to tutor and mentor children, to respond to disasters, support veterans, and recruit millions of volunteers to multiply their impact.

National service is built on smart, commonsense principles: Personal responsibility, public private partnerships, local control, and a business-like focus on results.

Our system of national service is a national treasure. As CEO, my top priority is to make it stronger and more sustainable for the future. That is the genesis of our transformation and sustainability plan, a comprehensive blueprint to strengthen national service for greater impact and for future growth.

Among other goals, this plan will improve customer service by putting more staff and resources in the field, make it easier to participate in our programs, strengthen business functions to be more efficient and to be more accountable, provide more flexibility and reduce burdens on grantees we've heard some good examples and suggestions of that already this morning and strengthen branding to ensure national service is better known, a critical goal. Making these changes is not easy, but it's essential, and we are really making very good progress.

Our world has changed enormously since AmeriCorps and CNCS was created 25 years ago. We've seen extraordinary advances in technology, major demographic shifts, new models of cross sector collaboration, and growing support for national service as a cost-effective strategy to solve problems. All this makes it an opportune time to reimagine national service for the next 25 years.

Let me touch on four areas of special promise:

With rising student debt and changing workforce needs, it's time to modernize the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award to provide more choice in where it's used, more fairness in how it's treated, and more value in how it helps those who serve pursue the course of education that's best for them.



America's businesses are increasingly applying their talent and expertise to meeting community needs, often in partnership with national service.

Doubling down on corporate partnerships will increase community impact and give companies access to the mission driven leaders they want for their teams. I'm particularly interested in exploring the potential of social impact investment as a partner for potential opportunity and growth.

The aging of our population offers an extraordinary opportunity to tap the wisdom and the experience of older Americans to serve in Senior Corps and other programs to meet the critical needs and improve the health of and well-being of our volunteers.

There are many ways to serve, but most young people don't know what the options are. By exploring a joint marketing and recruitment pilot between the military, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps, we could produce significant useful strategies to engage all Americans in all branches of service and reduce the military civilian divide.

My written testimony explores in detail these and other ideas to strengthen national service. Policies that require statutory changes are included for discussion purposes, not as official policy, as the administration currently does not have a legislative agenda in this area.

We appreciate the extensive work by commissioners and staff to develop a range of policy ideas. In order to provide our most thoughtful feedback, CNCS will be convening a working group to provide technical assistance as you continue your work.

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, this is an exciting and important time for national service. There's enormous potential, and we thank you for taking your mission so seriously. I look forward to answering your questions and engaging in this important discussion in the weeks and months ahead.



QUESTIONS BY THE COMMISSION

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you all for both your oral and written testimony. We'll now begin the period of commissioner questioning. I'll put myself on the clock for five minutes.

So, in the last year, as most of you know, we have traveled around the country rather extensively on our listening tour to listen and learn from the American public about the opportunities and the obstacles to national service. We've certainly learned that there is plenty of interest in national service and that the nation could be well served with even more national service opportunities.

However, we also heard about investments that could be made to improve national service while keeping the number of service positions the same, right? So, we're in a fiscally constrained environment. Where is there more bang for the buck? Is it in growing more opportunities or is it in better funding the opportunities that exist?

So, I want to go down and each person offer their perspective. I'll start with you. Ms. Brooks.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

I think at the Peace Corps; we're always looking at ways to be more efficient and perhaps diversifying the way that we're exploring the service. So, one of the areas that we're evaluating more closely is working with older Americans and seeing if there's opportunities to do what we have now, Peace Corps Response, so a shorter term of service and creating more interest and opportunities.



We've been in discussions initially with AARP and looking at ways to market that idea, so that would be an area where we could have folks that have more technical backgrounds, and then they may be able to be placed in shorter assignments. So that's a way to look at that.

Dr. Joseph Heck

All right.

Mr. Bugbee, what do you think? More money to those serving or more opportunities for those who want to serve?

Mr. Chris Bugbee

I think if we could focus first on improving and strengthening kind of our and you've heard that a lot, I think, in the testimonies the grant programs that currently exist, that puts us in a better position to grow.

If we were just to add new positions or try to grow service in our existing structure, I think it would be very difficult. So, I think we need to start by improving what we have and then grow from there.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Connolly?

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

Both.



Dr. Joseph Heck

How did I know that was going to be your answer?

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

You know, I think there is work to be done in terms of strengthening the current offer for young people and modernizing the system, as we've all talked about. But I also think there are existing resources that could be better deployed if we were to expand national service by tapping into other areas of federal investment. FEMA Corps is a fabulous example of that, that is projected to save the Federal Government \$60 million at scale.

And I think there are other federal agencies and there was a task force on this. There are pockets of money in those agencies that I think could be better deployed by using national service. Great example, Department of Transportation is doing a lot of work around distracted driving. You could imagine AmeriCorps members providing that sort of education in schools. And there are many, many more examples.

So, I think it is both, and I think we should be thinking about other existing resources that we could redeploy to this area.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Mr. Nguyen?



Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I'm going to second that also, both. There are already a lot of great opportunities that exist within programs like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps, but I do feel that can be expanded.

Part of what I had discussed in my testimony was the need for better branding. That's one of the biggest struggles that we have is getting people to know where the opportunities are. So, I don't think we should reinvent the wheel because we have those opportunities there. We have the opportunity for our young adults to serve in these programs.

I think the biggest focus should be on improving, but I also think that we should expand the national service opportunities because it saves a lot of federal dollars and it also provides a lot of young adults who may not have the opportunities.

For instance, when I was in FEMA Corps, I had the opportunity to serve in FEMA headquarters, which is not an opportunity your average young adult can do, as an unpaid intern. You know, if you're from Massachusetts, paying for your way in D.C., the cost of living I'm sure you're aware in D.C. is not manageable for somebody in college.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Ms. Stewart.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

And I'll ditto much of what's been said, but we need to make sure that these programs are available to all Americans. That investment is certainly necessary in terms of strengthening the programs, making them more accessible.



I also am a big believer in partnerships in terms of both within the Federal Government and with other organizations. I think that's one way that we can move the ball forward in terms of expanding the number of opportunities as well.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you so much.

Mr. Gearan.

Mr. Mark Gearan

Great. What great testimony. Let me dial back, Pierre, to your great, great testimony, for which we thank you for that, sharing your journey and impressive story about your service.

You mentioned that we have a branding problem. And, Barbara, I've known all your predecessors, and this is a common refrain since President Clinton started the Corporation for National and Community Service.

So, my question is: What could we be doing? And I guess the flip of it is: What are some of the downsides of a unified message? There are some programs, like Habitat and like others, that have a brand, arguably maybe even with more awareness than AmeriCorps.

So, drill down a little bit more, any of you, on this question: What would you commend to us to be thinking about for this branding and awareness problem? As Pierre said, he wasn't aware of it, and we've heard that around the country.

So, you've had this challenge, Barbara.



Ms. Barbara Stewart

Yeah, if I might start. This is one of the components of our transformation plan is a recognition that the way that we talk about ourselves creates confusion. It's possible that a young person will be serving in a program and not even fully realize they're an AmeriCorps member. We need to create a common experience for AmeriCorps members so that they know that they are part of our program. But we also have Senior Corps, which is an important part of our mission.

And candidly, our name, the Corporation for National and Community Service, doesn't roll off your tongue. But our funders know of it, and that's an important audience for us as well.

We have begun doing research to look at what brand equity we have in our various brands and to start to think about how we're going to be talking about ourselves as an organization in the future.

Another item that has been raised is the complication of the very important partners with whom we work. I actually see that as an opportunity for us because some of our important partners are well known but we need to be doing more co-branding. We need to take advantage of the equity of their brands but also make sure that participants in those programs that are well known are quite aware that they've had an AmeriCorps experience.

This is something that's a big focus of the corporation, but I'm also very interested in hearing what my fellow panelists have to say because we don't have all the answers. We're looking to others for good suggestions.

Mr. Mark Gearan

All right, AnnMaura, tell us the answer. Tell us what to do.



Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

So, I agree. I do think there's an opportunity in tapping the expertise of some of the grantees, some of the partner organizations like Habitat, folks with better known brands.

Right now, the corporation engages with grantees in a very sort of administrative way, and I think there's a way to open up the conversation and engage a more fulsome set of actors from our partner organizations in this conversation, and we should be working together to solve this problem.

I think part of what happens is the people that do promotion at Habitat don't actually aren't part of the AmeriCorps program, so they may not know that there is this issue. And so, I think we need to open up that line of communication.

I was walking through Times Square I was in New York last week, and I saw the military recruiting station right there in the middle of Times Square with the logos of the various branches of the military; and I thought to myself, because I was thinking about this hearing, wouldn't it be so great to see an AmeriCorps logo and a Peace Corps logo up there alongside all those other logos so that, you know, the millions of young people taking selfies in Times Square look up and think, oh, that's an opportunity for me.

And so, I think there is something in there is some opportunity, I think, in the partnership between all of these branches of service, if you will. And I think we do have to hold grantees more accountable for making sure that they're telling the story effectively.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

In Texas, on one hand, we set expectations for our grantees that they co brand, so all of our AmeriCorps have to be wearing the A, and we monitor for that.



Mr. Mark Gearan

I see a few behind you. John is back there.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Chris Bugbee

That might be kind of the heavier hand of it.

But on the flipside, I think as we build a better brand for AmeriCorps, it's really seen more as a win-win for our partners. So, if you're Habitat or Teach for America or 4 H that we have a program here in Texas, you will want to co-brand because you want people to know that your brand is strong enough, that you're one of the best AmeriCorps programs in the country. You know, you'll want to do that kind of win-win marketing.

Mr. Mark Gearan

Michelle, you have a brand.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

We have a brand. Yes, I was going to say we've been very fortunate that the Peace Corps brand is well known, and we also work within our countries to make sure that the Peace Corps Senegal or Peace Corps Guatemala also gets that recognition.

But I think that the idea of exploring, and that would come across to all of the service agencies, is some type of national service campaign or some type of way that you could bring in influencers. I mean, you think about what Bono did with debt relief and AIDS, and you look at Steph Curry, Nothing But Nets, and Christy Turlington, Every Mother Counts.



So I think there are ways to look at some national campaigns to really help reach out to the younger populations to give that whole concept of service and really engaging already in civic, you know, curriculums, whether that's in high school or into college; that's another way to really begin that planting of seeds of, you know, the benefit and the value of service as our nation, and it's something that we've been doing since the beginning.

Mr. Mark Gearan

Pierre, did you want to add anything?

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

Well, I was in high school over a decade ago, and there definitely was not any AmeriCorps branding during my time in high school. There was a lot of military branding, and as much as, you know, I found the military service to be very reputable, my parents discouraged it from the fact that they came from a war-torn country.

I would say that we really need to have that national brand, that push, like previous initiatives, like serving a year. Service Year Alliance has done a big push for that, but we have to regain that momentum.

But I also think it's on the part of the individual program, since a lot of these programs are no longer federally fund or federally run, that it's on we want to maintain a local essence along with that national brand. Because for these rural communities, national initiatives can be off putting. So to ensure that within those rural communities and those smaller communities where it's very tight knit, I think the concept of having them know that they're going to be serving their local community is a big benefit as well because as much as we want to use that national momentum, we also want to have that local essence as well.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Vice Chair Wada.

Ms. Debra Wada

Thanks. Thank you all for being here today.

Given my background on the military side and the comments that have been made this morning, I'm trying to understand. You know, we look at problems and we want to have a kind of holistic, whole of government approach, and it strikes me that with both sides, whether it's military or the national service, has a branding problem, has an integration problem.

So how do we break down those barriers between the national service community and the military to be able to get to where we think we need to be as holistically as we can; that service, whether it's military, national or public service, is an opportunity that is provided to young Americans holistically?

So, can you help me identify sort of what the barriers are right now to us working together, sort of between the agencies, and then also what your ideas are in terms of solutions?

Barbara, or I mean, all of you have some contribution, even from the field. How can we do it better?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

I don't want to be a microphone hog, but I will go first.

Ms. Debra Wada

Sure.



Ms. Barbara Stewart

What you're doing is making a big difference, right? You're focusing on these topics and looking at them holistically, which is enormously helpful. It is disappointing you know, I'm now in it, right? but about how in government agencies we become very siloed in what we're doing.

Ms. Debra Wada

Right.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

But the real opportunity is this opportunity. It's the opportunity to be working with our partners in government to communicate a broader message that really will resonate with young people.

So, we have begun, and the commission has actually been the stimulus for some of this, to be having conversations with our colleagues in the Army. For example, I participated in a meeting with the head of recruiting for the Army with the Peace Corps Dr. Olsen was there as well to talk about how we can jointly communicate.

We need to move from talking to action, but the work that you all are doing I think is actually extremely important to elevate this issue and elevate the opportunity so that people who are in a role like mine get our heads up and aren't just focused on fixing the problems at hand in our organization but looking for opportunities.

So, I am excited about what you all may be pushing forward that we would be very interested in supporting about joint communications.



Ms. Debra Wada

Okay. Ann?

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I would just say I think we've talked about this for a long time. Alan and Mark know that we've had this conversation now for many years. And I think it sort of happens at a national level, but we actually don't get practical about what's required to build the connective tissue.

And I remember having conversations with Ben Freakley, who used to be the head of Army Accessions, and he used to talk all the time about how they turn away, so you know, the military turns away so many young people who want to serve. And if we could figure out a practical way of saying, okay, that's not going to work for you for whatever reasons, but this is something you should think about.

And I think we have to start we just have to start. Because I feel like we keep having these conversations, but we actually don't build the architecture that is required for us to dive in and give it a go, right? Let's pilot it. Let's put those logos up in Times Square and figure out how to get the information out into the recruiting stations. That's a place to start.

And then thinking about there are some interesting bills moving, that are going to move again in this Congress, that look at communicating to selective service system registrants all the opportunities for service. So, I think there's more we can be doing, but I'm sort of anxious to just get going, dive in.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

Yeah, I would really agree with what's been said. I think that with Peace Corps, when there are folks that applicants that look at service and for whatever reason we're not able to accommodate them, we often refer them to the other service opportunities domestically.



I actually learned last night, we had a dinner with some returned Peace Corps volunteers and invitees and some applicants, and there's one volunteer who served for two years in the Dominican Republic, and he's heading off to the Army coming up here shortly.

And so, there's ways of how it would be really good to talk with him to find out how that you know, that became an interest, and, you know, we can explore those pits a little bit further.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

Some of this is happening despite our lack of making it happen, despite our involvement. We have so many returned Peace Corps volunteers who participate in our programs, so many people who have served in the military. There is a lot of cross fertilization that's going on, but not because we made it happen. So, we need to be more engaged.

Ms. Debra Wada

Thank you very much.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Ms. James?

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here this morning.

Ms. Stewart, I'm going to make you be a microphone hog. So, my first question is for you.



Mr. Bugbee testified that the grant application process is particularly challenging for rural and faith-based communities, and I have the great privilege to live in a very rural community right now, so I understand some of the challenges in the smaller smaller communities.

When I read about the CNCS Transformation Sustainability Program, I'm interested to hear how are those transformations going to help the rural and faith-based communities work through the challenges of the application process so that more of them will be situated to be able to do that?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

Great question. And we are tackling that in what I would call a macro and a micro way. So, from a macro way, trying to make our programs more simple in terms of the application process, in terms of the administration helps rise all those. Both our rural/faith based, our tribal, all of our grantees will benefit by the simplification that we are trying to underpin both in terms, again, of our application process and we've taken a number of steps in the last couple of years that have made good progress there.

So, both with our Senior Corps program and our AmeriCorps program, we've initiated a number of regulatory changes frankly that came from the field, that were recommended by people like my colleague from Texas who had suggested these are improvements. So, I feel good about that effort.

As we are restructuring how we are providing technical assistance, which we primarily currently do by telephone, by webinar, by e mail, but we will continue to be physically in rural and frontier and Native American communities.

One of the things that we've specifically focused on is putting in our new regional structure individuals with expertise whose particular responsibility will be rural communities and Native American communities, tribal communities.



There are particular challenges, right? There are it's harder when you don't have as broad of a nonprofit community because of being just stretched out geographically to be able to take advantage of the program as it's currently structured.

But both with our AmeriCorps program and our VISTA program, we're looking at ways that we can get individuals who might be served through intermediaries where they can operate in organizations that are located far from a city center.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Mr. Bugbee, I'm going to put you on the spot here.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Okay.

Ms. Jeanette James

Do you have any other suggestions, or when you're looking at what CNCS is doing in their transformation sustainability, how is that resonating with either rural and faith based communities?

Mr. Chris Bugbee

I think at the state commission level, because we're close to the ground, so to speak, the more flexibility that we have, oftentimes, you know, the grant process might take a year for someone to apply to find out that they might have AmeriCorps programs.

So state commissions had some flexibility, and our network has talked about kind of the Serve America fellows that are authorized but not funded, or flexibility with unexpended dollars



that grantees couldn't other grantees couldn't spend but come back to the state service commission, if we had some flexibility to do things in rural areas, waiving match requirements.

Just flexibility I think is key to being able to be responsive when our governors need us to respond to an issue throughout the state, and a lot of times that's in smaller communities when a disaster strikes, whatever it might be. We just need to be nimble and flexible and not kind of burdened by a lot of bureaucracy.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Dr. Davidson?

Dr. Janine Davidson

Sure. Thank you. Thank you all for coming today. It's been very illuminating. I share your passion for public service and national service of all kinds.

I'd like to turn the conversation a little bit to higher ed, and I'm wondering what sort of ideas or recommendations you might have to encourage higher education institutions to also promote the idea of public service and then, on the flipside, you know, incentives that you could have with higher ed and partnerships. Just I think there's a lot of opportunity there. I'm not quite sure what the role of the Federal Government is as well when you think about those things.

So how could you encourage those partnerships?



Mr. Pierre Nguyen

So, I've been pushing a lot in Texas to explore this same idea of how can we provide opportunities for our members, both graduating from our programs, and then also how do we use that opportunity to also recruit graduates from college into our programs.

And unfortunately, in the state of Texas, there's only three or four schools on the matching institution list for CNCS, the George Bush School of Government being one of them. I think that that is a big initiative that a lot of people aren't aware of; that some institutions will pledge to match an AmeriCorps Ed award.

And let's say an AmeriCorps member serves for 10 months. The current the current educational award is \$5,900. That can go a long way if an institution is going to match, so that is a major incentive for educational institutions to consider.

Additionally, if an educational institution was going to do that, they would be gaining servant leaders who have been tested, who have served in programs. As I spoke to before about the communication and conflict resolution skills that you receive during those programs are paramount.

So, I think there's incentive on both sides. I think it really is up to the educational institution to recognize that and recognize the benefits of gaining a servant leader in the classroom with other classmates.

And additionally, that helps with branding as well because when other when other college students hear about the experiences in AmeriCorps and how it benefited their classmates, it may encourage them to also serve in that program as well.

Dr. Janine Davidson

Ms. Brooks?



Ms. Michelle Brooks

The Peace Corps actually has two incentive programs that we're always looking to expand. One is called the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program, and this is a graduate program that's available to Peace Corps volunteers returning from the field, and it's an agreement that we work with.

We have over 100 of these programs across the United States, and it allows a returned Peace Corps volunteer to come back and pursue a graduate degree, and at the same time, part of that curriculum is serving in an underprivileged population as well as then receiving some type of benefit, up to 25% of the reduction in their tuition or the graduate classroom.

The other and we had actually just signed an MOU with The Bush School this fall to institute that program here, so it's very exciting.

The other program that we have is called Peace Corps Prep, and this is working with colleges and universities to find areas with a curriculum that if someone who is interested in Peace Corps service takes certain courses, then they get a certificate at the end of that time, and then they are able to note that on their application. And that's another way to elevate the awareness of Peace Corps and service in various universities and colleges, and that also has become very popular.

And the curriculum can be, you know, determined by that college as to whether, you know, it's international development courses or, you know, health courses or environment, and ways that that can count towards this particular program.

So, we're looking to expand those areas of incentive, and of course I think also the other area of student loan forgiveness or some type of work on that end is also an incentive in that regard.



Dr. Janine Davidson

That's undergraduate or graduate for the Peace Corps Prep, or both?

Ms. Michelle Brooks

It's undergraduate primarily, yes.

Dr. Janine Davidson

Undergraduate. Thank you.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

Thank you for your leadership in this area. I understand your university has just agreed to provide matching funds, so thank you very much.

Dr. Janine Davidson

We have, actually, yes.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

This is also an area I think where we can be working with state government. Both in Arizona and New Hampshire, there's legislation or initiatives that have been considered, particularly with the public university setting, but to try and either require some sort of service as part of the curriculum and/or some sort of financial initiatives. So, this is an area where we should be working we being CNCS but all of us should be working closely with governors.



Mr. Chris Bugbee

I think we could do a better job of helping academic institutions understand the match; that they can leverage that award.

And so also there's a lot of synergy in, as we build the brand for AmeriCorps and more people become aware of it, it's an easier sell to the academic institutions because they understand it and understand the value. We're not having to spend so much time explaining what AmeriCorps is.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I just got one I mentioned this before, but just one other thing.

I do think that we need to be thinking about this in the way that we think about employers of national service, so creating universities of national service where we can literally sign institutions on. There are 180 or something that are matching the ed award now, and that number is growing every day. But there are a lot of ways in which universities can benefit from folks who have done a year of service or encourage folks to you know, who are taking a gap year, if you will, midstream or even when they graduate.

So, I think there's a lot to be gained here, and there's some interesting experiments happening at Tufts and a lot of other places around this that I think we could be looking at and replicating.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Mr. Kilgannon.



Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Thank you. Thank you all for being here and for the work that you do, and I want to also add my thanks to the university for your very gracious hospitality. It's really an honor to be here and to discuss these issues.

And I think my question deals with philanthropy, and it may follow on to the previous question a little bit but in a broader way.

The chairman's opening question was about investment either in existing opportunities or creating more opportunities, and should the answer to that be the latter, expanding the opportunities, do you what can you tell us about the capacity, broadly speaking, in the philanthropic community to match to provide the matching resources for those new opportunities? And I would address that to Ms. Stewart and Ms. Connolly.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

So, a couple of things I'd comment along those lines. There is definitely capacity in the nonprofit world to engage in our programs, and I would use as evidence of that our competition every year for AmeriCorps' state and national resources.

Nonprofit organizations are applying to us for our component of the resources needed to run an AmeriCorps program, and we have consistently had more demand than we have than we have resources to give. So that's the good news/bad news, right? But the and the demand is significant. It's in the tens of millions of dollars, but it's not unlimited.

So, as we think about expanding national service, we need to be thinking about educating more A, simplifying, right? We've heard that; that's important. But also educating more nonprofits about the value of using service as a strategy.



As I wander around my life when I'm not in Washington, D.C., I encounter all kinds of young people who didn't know that AmeriCorps was an option for them, older people who haven't heard of Senior Corps, but interestingly, a lot of nonprofits that don't recognize that AmeriCorps and/or service could be a strategy to significantly enhance their impact.

So we have more demand than we have resources, but we also if we're going to seriously change the trajectory of national service and the number of opportunities, we're going to need to do some work in the philanthropic sector to get nonprofit organizations prepared to take advantage of that growth.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

Yeah. I mean, I agree with that. I think I think last year or a couple of years ago was the first year that the private investment in AmeriCorps actually exceeded the federal investment in AmeriCorps, and so the role that AmeriCorps plays in creating a marketplace, if you will, that the private sector then engages in is critical.

And one of the things that we've seen as we're out trying to raise money for the work that we do is that particularly private sector companies like that their funding is matched, right? So, they like that I'm in for a dollar, you're in for a dollar. Maybe there's another public stream of funding or another philanthropic stream of funding.

But checkbook philanthropy when it comes to AmeriCorps doesn't really work. It's really about true engagement with the private sector in the work, and when you do that, it has all kinds of dividends, so thinking about AmeriCorps members' career trajectories after they do their year of service. Finding ways in kind to support AmeriCorps members, we've talked about that.



So, it's really got to be a very integrated strategy, but you pull one leg out of the stool and the whole thing collapses. So, I think it's got the match issue, the public/private nature of this I think is critical to really being able to scale it.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Thank you.

Mr. Bugbee, in your testimony you referenced small nonprofits. What is a small nonprofit? Do you define that as budget size, personnel, what do they do? Tell us about the challenge between

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah. I think we tend to think of a small or a community based nonprofit as one that might not have a national affiliate that it's a part of, so it's, you know, not necessarily, you know, so small that you would consider like a mom and pop shop, but just one that doesn't have that additional infrastructure to support them overall.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Great. Thank you.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Ms. Haines?



Ms. Avril Haines

Thank you. First of all, thank you, all of you, for spending your time with us but also for the tremendous work that you do in these areas.

I wanted to sort of focus in on this question of how we can get to communities and to folks who may be interested in serving, particularly in the younger generation, who don't normally get into the service space.

And I think, you know, Pierre, you talked very passionately, I think, and powerfully about your experience and the impact that service had on you. And all of you work in areas where you see how the younger generation can benefit from the service opportunities they get, for their career, for strengthening their communities and so on.

But we all know that there's sort of in each of these areas in different ways parts of society that tend to get more awareness and access to these service opportunities than others, and I'd like to see more diversity across the board in how it is that we essentially approach this.

But I wonder: What do you see as the key elements to essentially engaging and attracting different parts of the community that don't normally see it?

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I think the big thing is really getting into the communities. American YouthWorks does that a lot in our mission. For instance, we have a New Start program where we engage juveniles who may be incarcerated or after they get out to help them transition back into the community.

We engage in various aspects of youth and young adult development, and I would say that that is the most significant thing is being out in the community and also having those turning around those people that have been in those situations that are in underserved populations and



encouraging them to continue to serve in capacities, such as myself, because what I've noticed growing up is that there weren't servant leaders reflective of how I looked.

So, I think it's a mix, and it's a very complex it's a complex issue to tackle. But for the most part, getting into those communities, gaining the trust of those communities, and education, education of what AmeriCorps is, education of what the Peace Corps is, education of what national service is.

Because I feel that when you're when you're working and you're just making ends meet, your understanding of what national service is, the value is not really is not really leveraged. They don't understand the value of the jobs training we provide. There's not that value of the educational award. So, it's really in the education and getting out in those communities, gaining the trust of the communities you're trying to encourage to serve.

Ms. Avril Haines

Thank you.

Do you have anything?

Ms. Michelle Brooks

Yeah. At the Peace Corps, we have currently 7,300 volunteers serving abroad, and about 33% of those represent diverse populations. But we've over the last few years changed our recruiting model so it's no longer the brick and mortar, but we have recruiters now that operate more virtually. And so, we're better able to target, for example, working with historically black colleges or working with historically Hispanic colleges, but also trying to be reflective of the populations that we're trying to reach.



So, we are working at engaging in communities and with colleges that represent more of that diversity and help to educate them about the service opportunities.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

And where we could always do better at CNCS, but we have about 50% of our participants are from diverse populations, which is good, but we could do better.

As Pierre was saying, being in communities makes a big difference. I am thrilled when I run into someone who is serving in our programs and they say to me, I was a beneficiary of a service. I was a beneficiary of an AmeriCorps member or a Senior Corps volunteer service. So that's how they may have learned about service as an opportunity, but we can always be doing better in this regard.

I actually think that some of the joint recruitment that we have discussed with our colleagues from the military could help us expand in that regard.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

I mean, we've started to have conversations with our grantees about diversity and inclusion, and we've had conversations about disability inclusion for a long time, but starting to kind of broaden that and really think about diverse populations as they're doing the recruiting and struggling with recruiting.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

Just one I know we're at the end, but one it's a little bit of a different thought, but it's access and awareness, but it's really also what is the offering we're offering young people. And it is at the moment very difficult for somebody in a low-income community to actually do a year of



service on the current stipend, which is taxed, and we have to fix that. And so, I think part of it is also really thinking about how do we make it possible and doable for young people to do this.

Ms. Avril Haines

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Ms. Skelly.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all our panelists for being here today and thank you to all y'all in the audience. I hope we have a long line for comments. I look forward to them.

The discussion earlier, and it's come back a few times, has been about branding and the big picture aspects of that, and that's been helpful. And I'd like to take it down a level and talk about the implementation of that.

But first I'd like to mention we've just had some discussion that reflects earlier discussion about people moving between different forms of service, national folks who have served in national service programs serving in the military, folks in the military service finding their way into national service. And it's been explained those are instantiations that just kind of happen as people learn, you know, through their life's experience and trying new things. It hasn't been formalized or programmatic.

So, it's the programmatic follow through branding that I'd like to talk to y'all ask your thoughts on, where in our learning tour and our research, our research director has provided us with a framework we call the three A's, awareness, aspiration and access. You need to be aware



of programs to be able to think about them, aspire to things, and then you have to be able to access them and actually, you know, close that deal and serve your country or do anything.

So, I'd like to get to the awareness portion of branding, which can be termed "education." How do you educate to make people, individuals, younger people, where what would a formal program that follows on from branding we love the Times Square picture and things like that. How do you raise the prominence and the awareness to some of the other more prominently known programs?

How do you close that deal through a program to get, for instance, to schoolchildren, not just college students but to actually schoolchildren, younger people around the country?

Ms. Connolly, I'd like to start with you and anybody else who wants to lean forward.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

Sure. So, it is interesting that we haven't there are disconnects between obviously military and civilian national service, but there also are disconnects between service efforts for younger people and AmeriCorps, the current system of national service.

And there used to be a program called Learn and Serve America which funded service-learning programs, and it was not the funding was discontinued for a variety of reasons. And one of the reasons is that it was spread out, it was given to state departments of education, and it was not a lot of money per state departments of education. So, there wasn't really ever a constituency, and it wasn't connected to the current system of national service.

So, I actually think if we could find a way to create a Junior AmeriCorps program that would engage young people in middle and high school to really create that on ramp to AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps, I think that could be extraordinarily helpful.



And I think there are a lot of national service alumni that have come through the various programs that could be great innovators in that space, and so thinking about an XPRIZE or something like that, where you could say to AmeriCorps alumni help us build this. How do you know; you guys have been through this program. What is it young people need to know before they think about doing that?

So, I think that is one potential area for both getting back into supporting younger young people doing service but also getting the connectivity with AmeriCorps. I think that could be enormously helpful.

And I do think that we there are ways in which we could be working with grantees around the country to strengthen the partnership between them and the corporation around this particular issue that I think would bear real fruit.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Anyone else?

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I would agree with Ms. Connolly. Despite my parents discouraging me from enlisting in the military, I did attend JROTC, so I'm very familiar with a program that prepares you for other careers coming out.

I don't know how that would look, but I just wanted to kind of state that that is something that I think would really benefit, is getting young adults and youth familiar with the program at a younger age. Learning what services, learning the benefits of service would instill that foundation that would lead them later on to want to serve.



Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah, I would just add that I think the younger we can start, the better, just to give people time to plan. So, if you're learning about it, you know, right before we're expecting you to start service, it's almost too late in some cases.

So, beginning to instill that concept of service, partnering with associations of guidance counselors, you know, whatever it might be, whatever the infrastructure is, school principals and others, just to start to expand their awareness of service and even

I mean, teachers, in my experience, are always looking for great things to use in their classrooms, so if there are tools that they could use to incorporate service when they're teaching math or, you know, reading or other things, you know, just to begin to expose kids to the concept of service and volunteerism and before, you know, it's time for them to serve.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

Just quickly, the Peace Corps also has a Coverdell schools program while volunteers, while they're serving, can already start connecting back to their hometowns and work with a local school.

There's oftentimes where they'll be Skyped in so that the students can actually hear what's going on, and they have chances then to also there's curriculums that have been set up that are resources for educators, especially in the elementary schools. So, there is some thought to that.

But again, it's only done on, you know, a smaller scale level, but there is that opportunity to begin to plant seeds with those younger students so they have a chance to see, oh, look at,



they're working in this country, and look what they're doing, and look what they're eating. It gives them ideas.

And so, it's been a great opportunity, but it definitely could be something to be expanded upon.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Mr. Khazei.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you all. This has been extremely helpful. And thank you all for your commitment to service and raising awareness for all these issues.

So, I want to build off of what my fellow commissioner Shawn just asked with a couple of specific ideas, and I really appreciate what you said about it has to be continuing, it has to start early.

As we've traveled the country, we've seen some great community service programs in schools, but it's not consistent. We also learned, I think as you just said, Chris, that if you ask a young person when they're 18 to serve for a year, that's the first time they've ever been asked about it or thought about it, it's almost too late.

So, a couple of ideas we've explored I'd love your opinions on. One is and I see Shirley Sagawa here who's testifying in the next panel; she championed this. If we were building a continuum, we look at certain life stage periods for young people.



So, one thing we've been exploring is a summer of service for 8th, 9th, 10th graders when they're too young to go to paid work, but they're old enough that they actually really can do something, so that's as a sort of life stage. It's not a full year, but it's advantage for a summer. That's one idea.

Another is I have a high school my daughter is a high school junior. She has a lot of friends who are now seniors. We are now in senior spring. If you're going to college and you're in, it's kind of a, hey, party, let's just get out of school. If you're not going to college, for her friends who aren't going to college, they're like I've got to get a job.

So another idea we've been looking at is what about a senior spring semester of service as a capstone where young people would it would be part of the educational curriculum, it would be service learning, but they'd do a community service project that they could help design as a way to finish their high school career and give them exposure to think about, well, maybe I'll do a year. If you're going to work, you could get some great work experience. If you're going off to school, well, it could really be a way to sort of finish your senior year strong and not just be partying and celebrating.

So, thoughts on either or both of those ideas? Do you think they're good, what would you recommend, how could we do them, et cetera? Anybody who wants to start.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I'll dive in. So, I love both of those ideas it won't surprise you to know but I do think there is that we're leaving a lot of talent on the table. When our AmeriCorps and Peace Corps folks leave and go on with their lives, we are not asking them to reinvest back in the system, and I think we should be.

So if you could if we could think about a way to do one or both of those and I think they're both great ideas but really tap the talent of our alumni in both AmeriCorps and the Peace



Corps to help create and run those programs, it would help to create the connectivity between the options for later on, whether it's AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps.

So, you know, I think there's a ton of talent that we can tap to do that out there, but I would encourage us to really think about it holistically and connected to the existing system of national service because I think part of what didn't work about Learn and Serve America was that it wasn't connected, and so I think we've got to find a way to make it a continuum.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Yeah, I liked your idea more about Junior AmeriCorps. That's really creative.

Barbara?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

We do have some summer programming. We need to do more of that, so that "taste of" is really what gets people hooked. People either see their family members or parents or neighbors engaged in service, or they're not exposed; and if they're not exposed, this isn't a route they take.

So, to have a school offering that is short term taste is a great idea, and I love AnnMaura's suggestion of using our alumni. But we do fund some programs and organizations have to choose to do that.

All of our as you know well, all our resources are deployed against local priorities. People want to choose to do these programs but making potential grantees aware, more aware of the opportunity to do a summer program and to have more junior participants would go a long way. We see a lot of our participants who have been in these shorter summer programs then aspire for a full year of AmeriCorps and sometimes aspire for a second year after that.



So, we need to be, as a CNCS organization, encouraging those with whom we're currently working that this is an opportunity, making them aware that it's an opportunity.

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I think they would call that the service bug, when you catch the service bug. We have specific examples of that.

So AYW doesn't only work with young adults that, you know, are straight out of college. We have a particular member that had gone through the juvenile system, was incarcerated and was able to participate in the foster grandparent CNCS Senior Corps program. And he was influenced by the Senior Corps member to come to AYW, American YouthWorks, and he ended up joining our Conservation Corps. And eventually after serving with us he started a career in wildland firefighting.

So, there are systems like that that exist. I think we definitely should push more into high school and push more into earlier education because those linkages can happen more often, but they do exist currently.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

Yeah, I would just add to really support what AnnMaura said about the continuum, because I think Peace Corps has the third goal of volunteers are to come back and share with Americans about the country where they served, but to make sure that

We do really well at goal one and two, but the third goal has always been a little harder, and I think to have some motivation to really get folks into the community and into the schools at a younger age in some organized way could really be of benefit.



Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah, I think the network of state commissions is always talking about how we can better engage alumni, so I love the idea of using them for programs like this.

And I know there are a lot of school districts, I know in Texas, that have some taste of that, you know, internship type program that they're doing, so there may be ways that we can learn from some of those existing programs and maybe look at piloting things so that it's incremental and you're able to evaluate and then really have some evidence to show other schools how impactful it is, and I think that would help grow that.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Great. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. So that concludes the first round of questioning. Is everybody doing okay? All right. So, we'll move right into the second round, so again I'll put myself on the clock for five minutes.

So, I want to follow up on a question that Vice Chair Wada had talked about which is trying to make that connection between the military and the national service programs. Just specifically to you, Ms. Connolly, and you, Ms. Stewart because you've mentioned, you know, we've talked about it forever; we just need to do it, right?

So why isn't it being done? What are the obstacles that you're actually facing? Is it lack of reception by the Pentagon? Is it I mean, what is the issue that is preventing the integration between the national service programs and the military?



As we all know, roughly 70% of today's youth are ineligible to serve in the military but yet they're still walking into recruiting stations.

So how do we fix that integration problem? What are your thoughts?

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

Well, I think we need we need a plan, and we need to train our recruiters on both sides about the opportunities in the other service areas. And I think that that's sort of that's key.

I think that leaders have talked about, and leaders move on into other roles, and I think it just never actually gets implemented, so, Barbara, I'm counting on you to make it happen.

Because I think if we're able to educate our recruiters on either side, that's a first step to say, you know what, I'm sorry, this isn't going to be your thing, but go look at that; I think that's critical. And I think looking at all the ways we communicate with young people about military service and wondering whether or not we can incorporate some messaging around national service as part of that as well.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Barbara, thoughts?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

So, my husband has a funny joke about a two animal cooperation. One's a little squirrel, and one's a giant horse, and the ability of the two animals to work together. And we are a little bit of the giant the little squirrel. I probably should not have called CNCS a little squirrel. Let's take that off.



But where I'm going with this is AnnMaura was just talking about the recruiters on both sides. We have a very diffuse system of recruitment. So, our AmeriCorps grantees do the vast majority of recruiting for the AmeriCorps program. We do recruit for VISTA, and we recruit for NCCC, but the amount of resources that we deploy for recruitment for AmeriCorps the military spends in less than a day.

So, we have lots to gain from this partnership, and therefore we really need to get going on it, right? We have so much to gain. We've had some good conversations. We need on both sides to do more follow through. We could benefit so much from this partnership, but we need to be a more aggressive potential partner with our colleagues in the military to move some of the ideas past talk and into action.

Possibly, doing this on a grand, grand scale may be too much initially, but to look at should we be piloting this, either in terms of piloting strategies or piloting geographically or both, to see what gains we could make.

I think we would be both partners in this dialogue would be delighted by the outcome; that's my gut intuition. I think that's probably where you all are leaning as well. But tackling this in a smaller way may allow us to get the evidence that we need to get the resources to move it forward.

Dr. Joseph Heck

So, to the best of either your knowledge, are there any statutory or regulatory obstacles to this occurring, or is it just a matter of momentum? Or you can take it for the record, if you want to, you know, think about that or scour respective authorities and get back to us.



Ms. Barbara Stewart

I'd love to get back to you on that. My year in Federal Government has led me to conclude that every good idea has an obstacle that you didn't realize was going to be in your way, but we should be looking at that also.

Dr. Joseph Heck

I'll tell you, some of us went to Fort Knox to meet with the U.S. Army Recruiting Command and met with actual recruiters who happened to be down there, and they all agreed that this was a great idea; that if they had to turn somebody away, why don't they have a card to hand to somebody and say, "Hey, this may not be for you, but here's another option to serve." So, I appreciate that.

Real quickly, Mr. Bugbee.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah.

Dr. Joseph Heck

So as the state commission, have you looked at piloting anything like this with folks who walk into a National Guard recruiting station, since it's both state/state type operation?

Mr. Chris Bugbee

No, but I think it's a great idea, so I think we can explore that. And I think just the commission itself kind of elevating national service and talking about it on the same platform as military service and helping people who are serving in AmeriCorps recognize the fact that they are serving our country is a huge step forward.



And I think, you know, if we could get to the point where in the budget AmeriCorps national service aren't zeroed out every year, that would be a huge step. I think, you know, if you're looking at a federal agency like Department of Defense or recruiters, and you might be wondering, well, is this program going to be around or not? So, I think if we can get to the point where as a society we recognize the value of national service, I think that would be huge progress.

Dr. Joseph Heck

I think if Government Abbott called up to TAG and said, hey, I want your guys to refer to you if they can't join the Guard, I think it would probably happen in short order.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah. I think we will go back and explore that for sure.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thanks.

Mr. Gearan?

Mr. Mark Gearan

Great. To add more on to Barbara, because we both raised the question of the Segal education grant and, by extension, I think the Peace Corps Readjustment grant, despite years of calls, it remains taxable, right?

So, give us the best argument that you would offer or commend to us to be thinking about to make this tax exempt. Is it a variant of service? Is it give us the best argument. We've been talking about this for some time in this space.



Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

We actually have made real progress on that in the last year. I'm happy to report we almost got it over the finish line last year, which we didn't quite because there wasn't a moving vehicle. But we did all the legwork, and the House bill has been reintroduced, and we expect the Senate one to be reintroduced shortly.

What I would say on that is that it actually it's so dysfunctional for AmeriCorps members, because what they end up doing is actually not realizing the full value of their award because they have to use strategies to kind of stretch it out because of the tax burden.

We have been collecting stories about the hardship, including we had to go get a credit card to pay off our tax liability on this issue. So, it allows AmeriCorps members to get to their higher education.

And if you look across folks who served and folks who are currently in service, all of them no, the vast not all the vast majority of them have plans to go on to higher degrees or to complete their university experience, but they are so hamstrung by this ed award that the value of it is so diminished that they actually put their educational plans on hold to the point where they feel like they can afford to pay the tax.

So, I think we you know, it will accelerate their ability to get on with their lives, get on with their education, to move into jobs if we can deal with this tax issue because folks are putting it off.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

And huge kudos to AnnMaura and her team and all the allies she's brought to this argument because it is a disadvantage that we have.



I would also suggest that looking at how we use the allowed use of the award is also something we should also be thinking about. When it was created 25 years ago, it was specific for higher ed. It's a little bit constrained in terms of how it can be used, and now there are different forms of education that participants might want to avail themselves of. So, thinking about allowing the award to be used for more technical, non-higher ed education.

I'm personally a believer that it should be used for some form of education, but we currently constrain the opportunities, the educational opportunities; and if someone wants to use it for a technical or vocational program, that feels to me like a very good use.

So, I think we should be both looking at the taxation, so that our members can enjoy the full value, as well as broadening the potential use.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

One other thing I would just add to that is that I think many folks don't understand that when you earn your education award and you decide you're going to actually use it, the education award goes directly to either the loan holder or the institution that you're trying to go to or that you're going to go to. So, you actually that money never enters your bank account, but yet you're responsible for this tax liability.

And so, when we explain that to people, universally people say, you're right, that's crazy. Why is that? And it's an inequity because the National Health Service Corps education benefit is not taxed. Obviously, the GI benefit is not taxed.

So, I think it is it has been a technical issue that we haven't been able to get it over the finish line because not enough members of Congress have said this is a priority for me. But again, we made real headway on this, and I'm determined this year.



Mr. Mark Gearan

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Vice Chair Wada.

Ms. Debra Wada

Thank you very much.

The question I have is for all of you, actually, because we've heard a lot of how can we fix the program, make things better. There's been a lot of ideas.

But if you were being a queen for the day and you got to choose only one, which would you put your priority on that the commission say the commission was told you get Congress says you get to fix one problem. Which one should we focus on or should we place probably like put it at the top of the list that it's important from your perspective? And I know it might all be different, that's why I want all five of you to respond.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

There's always a risk going first because somebody else may have a much better idea afterwards that you wish you had said.

But I actually think the marketing and branding challenge is our challenge, and the reason I say that is it creates demand that addresses other concerns that we have. So, if more nonprofits knew about strategies of service, if more Americans knew about volunteerism and national service, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, as an opportunity for them, it would create the groundswell that we are all trying to create.



The army of advocates would be that much greater, and therefore it would create an environment where we could address so many of these other problems. So that sounds simplistic, but to me it feels daunting.

Ms. Debra Wada

Right.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

But I do think a broader marketing communication strategy for which we currently have virtually no resources but again, I'm optimistic with the work that you're doing creates a megaphone for us to be talking about these issues with a much broader set of audiences.

So again, they'll have better ideas than I did.

Ms. Debra Wada

Thank you, Ms. Stewart.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

It's hard to choose one. From the Peace Corps' perspective, I think extending the noncompetitive eligibility from one to three years for return volunteers is not only a benefit, obviously, for those coming back to the field, but also in the marketing and branding of the service going in. Because right now it's just one year, and that goes by very quickly when a volunteer is returning from the field and trying to navigate, you know, next steps.

So that extension would be a big win for us and, I think, a way to not only offer different opportunities across the Federal Government to continue the investment that has been made.



Ms. Debra Wada

Great.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

I think from my perspective, simplifying the programs is huge, and it puts us in a better position to grow and be successful. So, simplifying the grant administration process and simplifying kind of the differences between the streams of service or the flavors of service, I think, would help.

Ms. Debra Wada

Thank you.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I'm going to say if you could crack the code on this partnership between the military and civilian national service, that would be a home run and would actually address a lot of the pain points from recruitment to branding to other things. So, I think it has a lot of ancillary benefits, so that would be mine.

Ms. Debra Wada

All right.

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I agree with all those. I would you know, the biggest thing is definitely marketing, getting into those underserved populations, getting into those diverse populations. So, I would say in



addition to marketing is somehow getting rid of those barriers; that would be the biggest challenge.

And if we could if we could eliminate those barriers magically the next day and be able to allow all young adults to know of this opportunity, I think more young adults would take the opportunity to serve.

Ms. Debra Wada

Great. Thank you very much.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Ms. James.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Brooks, I'd like to focus on you. We heard previously I think it was Mr. Bugbee who talked about working with folks with disabilities. So, we understand that the Peace Corps is exploring ways to accommodate people with disabilities and older Americans through a virtual volunteer program or a service model, virtual volunteer service model. Can you talk about this model and how successful has it been?

And you I think you mentioned previously about working with older Americans and trying to encourage their service, and so how successful have you been, has the Peace Corps been, with working with folks who are older and with disabilities?



Ms. Michelle Brooks

Sure. The concept of a virtual volunteer is still in exploratory stage. It's something that has been raised to us. If we look at, for example, U.N. volunteers, they have a pretty robust program, and also looking at corporations, where there is the corporate social responsibility and where employees are able to use their expertise virtually. So, we're just starting that out in the nascent stage right now.

But we do have programs where we're able to accommodate volunteers with disabilities, so we've had deaf volunteers, blind volunteers, being able to go out and conduct their service.

We also have a program, actually, for many years in Kenya we're not in Kenya right now, but we had it before we left Kenya that it was a whole program set up to teach the deaf, because many times these populations in these developing countries are shunned or, you know, put away. And so, this is an opportunity that we've had to engage with those populations.

Also working within the education field and special education, that's another area that we've been working quite a bit.

So, we've been exploring some of these areas a little bit further. I think, as I mentioned, reaching out to AARP and looking at how we can bring in the older Americans to serve, and looking again at the short-term opportunities versus the two year commitment.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you. I'm going to continue on the theme of older Americans because, as I look across my colleagues, I think I'm it for the older American up here.

So I'm going to ask Ms. Stewart and Ms. Connolly: I understand that we've been told that there are some barriers for older Americans to serve, for example, in the Senior Corps program because, for example, you have to have income eligibility requirements to serve in both foster



\grandparent and senior companions programs, And we've had folks recommend that those income eligibility requirements be eliminated.

So, I'm interested to know from your points of view: What would the effect be of eliminating those income eligibility requirements on the programs? And do you see that that would be a benefit, or would there be a disadvantage to the program by doing that?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

So, the day I was confirmed for this job, I became Senior Corps eligible, so I am excited about the opportunities for older Americans to take advantage of our programs.

So, the Senior Corps programs actually have our two biggest programs in terms of appropriation, not in terms of number of participants, are foster grandparent and senior companion.

Those programs have an eligibility requirement in terms of income in terms of getting a stipend, and the stipend is a tiny remuneration, \$2.65 an hour. So, it helps cover the cost for lower income Americans to serve. And to be considered a lower income American for our program, it's 200% of the poverty level. So, they get a small financial benefit for serving.

We actually have non income eligible participants in those programs that don't get the a stipend. We should be doing more, frankly, to encourage Americans who are above the 200% of the poverty level to participate in our programs. We have more than 10% of the participation are what you might call ineligible in terms of the fact that they don't get the stipend.

We also have our RSVP program, which is a bigger program, where we help organizations throughout the country identify potential volunteers, and the work that those older Americans are doing is also really impactful. We need to spread that out, though.

I mean, candidly, as someone else mentioned, there are about 30% of our country are currently volunteering. More older Americans could be participating in our programs, and the



220,000 that are currently participating are just the tip of the iceberg. I think there's a lot of opportunity for innovation in all of our Senior Corps programs.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

The only thing I would add is that I think \$2.65 is too low and we need to get that stipend increased for low income folks who are wanting to serve in these programs. We've been working with Senior Corps community to try to raise that to a whopping \$3 an hour, but hopefully we'll get there. But I agree with Barbara. I think there's a ton of innovation opportunity there.

And RSVP is an unsung hero; it is powering so many nonprofits in small and rural communities that I think we need to raise up the visibility of that up as well.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you. Great.

Dr. Davidson?

Dr. Janine Davidson

You know, when one gets asked to serve on one of these commissions, it's usually it's definitely an honor. It's usually because you're passionate about this. I know everybody at this table is passionate about the idea of service.

But on the other hand, you often say, "Well, you know, it's a commission. You write a report and then nobody reads it." That's always our greatest fear. So, I mean, I am heartened by the comments that you feel as though we're raising awareness just by doing what we're doing.



But, Barbara, you said something in your opening remarks. You said it is an exciting time for national service. When we issue our report, we want people to read it. We want to make a big statement. We want people to think about service. Is it really an exciting time or why is it an exciting time? What is the policy window that we can latch onto so that people will pay attention to what we're all in this room passionate about?

What ideas do you all have for how we can capture the attention of the American people next year?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

One benefit I think we have right now is a generation of young people who are more connected than ever certainly more than when I was young and have an ethos and a passion for service. So, I think tapping into that is an opportunity.

I think tapping into the number of older Americans who have talent and commitment and time to serve our country we talk a lot about serving your country in a volunteer service capacity when you're young, which is a great time to develop skills and position yourself for the future, but many people don't have that ability until later in their career.

So, I feel like on both ends of the demographic spectrum, there's a lot more interest and opportunity. And technology has its challenges, but it also creates a lot of opportunity for connection, for communication, for education in terms of what service can be doing for folks both in terms of their communities and for themselves.

So, I do feel like we're on a cusp of greater awareness. We've just gone over the 1.1 million mark for AmeriCorps alumni, and thinking about how we can mobilize that army of people who have participated in our programs, if we had a Pierre everywhere talking about what has happened in his life, how service has impacted him. We need to be mobilizing that army. So, I am optimistic. I'm optimistic.



Mr. Pierre Nguyen

When we talk about my field of disaster services, it's a growing field. If you look at Houston, Houston's had over three 500-year floods in the last five years, so it requires a lot of stamina, a lot of energy and a lot of passion to be able to help a community as big as Houston recover.

You can see an example of that with the AmeriCorps members sitting in our audience right now. You know, they're out there working in Houston helping the disaster survivors that have been affected by Harvey.

It's such an inspiring story to see neighbors helping neighbors, and neighbors across I would consider that all Americans are neighbors. We're all one country, and we're all united in service.

So when Barbara is talking about, you know, this is an exciting time for national service, it's an exciting time because it's really impactful to be able to see your fellow American helping you and having that opportunity to help you and also them gaining the experience out of helping you.

Mr. Mark Gearan

Wow. We're going to run you for office.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I'm totally voting for you.

Go ahead.



Ms. Barbara Stewart

The other thing that national service does I mean, when you think about programs addressing our big problems, I think many people would argue that the lack of civility and the inability of communities to communicate with one another, the lack of conversation in a healthy way across lines is something people are worried about. It's a national issue, and frankly national service volunteerism goes a long way to addressing a big, audacious problem.

But when you see an NCCC team, like the group sitting behind us, who are from all over the country from very different backgrounds working together on a common problem, the relationships they'll build, the attitudes that they'll develop from this experience are what helps to address that national challenge we have right now.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I would just say I'm excited about I'm excited about this report because we have members of Congress, both sides of the aisle, coming to us on a regular basis to say, "I really want to do something on this, but I need some ideas." So, I'm hoping that you guys are going to come out of this with a whole bunch of material for us to share with those interested members of Congress.

And I think I think that's a huge opportunity for us, to really tap that groundswell of support. We have really strong and vibrant caucuses, national service caucuses in the House and the Senate, and we're adding members to those every day. And folks really want to do something on this, so I think that's an opportunity.

And, you know, we're probably not supposed to get political, but we do have a presidential election right around the corner, so it's going to be a bit of an ideas fest, right, at least at the outset, before it turns into something else. And so maybe this is an opportunity to get this out into the conversation nationally as well. So, I'm excited about the report and can't wait to leverage it.



Ms. Michelle Brooks

Yeah, I think I would just echo what Barbara touched on, is that there's a lot of passion and intensity, but then we have a lot of areas where there's not great civility. So, I think this is another way to really dive in, and, you know, here's some ways to direct those that passion and really find ways to support the United States overall.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

I think Barbara mentioned hitting the million mark. It's also 25 years for AmeriCorps, and in a lot of states we've been talking about volunteers and community service hitting around 40 years. So, this idea of kind of re-imagining and talking about what's next I think really resonates with people.

Dr. Janine Davidson

Thank you. Thank you, very helpful.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Mr. Kilgannon?

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Thank you.

One of the themes that has developed here today and throughout our travels is elevating national service, and I believe in that, and our vision is every American inspired and eager to serve, and I believe in that. But I do want to challenge the equation of military and national service a little bit, because I don't always see them as the same.



In my day to day work, I work with military families and those who have served in the military. I've met many, many young people who no longer have a parent because of military service, many service members who left a piece of their body or a piece of their soul overseas. And it is that experience that informs this concern that, when we talk about national service being on the same or similar plane as military service, it gives me pause.

Is there any validity to my concern?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

I don't want to be a hog. I'd say yes, and I'll elaborate, but I...

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I believe there is. I believe there are different challenges that somebody that's serving in a national service program and the military goes through.

I would not in any way, you know, try to say that the sacrifices that a military member has endured overseas or even here is in any way similar to that, but there is a growth process on both sides.

I think when we're talking about, we're talking about leveraging the military recruitment strategy to help with national service marketing or, you know, branding, it's more so emphasizing that there's other ways to serve.

Because if we look at the military I can't think of the exact percentages, but I believe it's about 20%, 20 a little more than 20 to 30% are eligible to go into the military. That leaves a number of young adults who are considering a career in service with the inability to know of a way to serve.

I have some statistics here from the Bureau of Labor that says that roughly a third of high school students that come out of that come out of high school are not going to college, right, so



two thirds will go to college. One third of that 3 million of high school graduates this is based on a 2018 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics 1 million will not go to college. So, what are those 1 million people doing? What are those 1 million high school graduates doing? So, it's allowing them an ability to find an option.

And I'm not sure if that addresses that concern at all, but it's more so I think it's not saying that, you know, national service and military have the same sacrifices. It's just allowing another form of service for young adults to a pathway for them to go to serve.

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah, I would agree with that. I don't think anyone would equate the sacrifices of a military someone serving in the military with the sacrifices that someone might make in national service. But when you're thinking about public serving your country, I think it's just providing another option.

And so, when we talk about elevating national service, we're not talk personally I'm not thinking of elevating it to make that kind of comparison, but just to show that it is an option. It's there, and you can be proud to serve your country and serve in AmeriCorps. And I think everyone who is serving in AmeriCorps would be deeply respectful of those who are serving in the military.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Yes.

Anybody else?



Ms. Barbara Stewart

Beautifully said by our two colleagues. I thought they did a great job of expressing that view.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Ms. Haines?

Ms. Avril Haines

Sure. I'll take it as a slight turn.

Michelle, you talked about noncompetitive eligibility and federal service, and, Pierre, you also mentioned it in the context of your testimony. You know, and something AnnMaura said is we don't do enough in a sense to tap into the talent, I think you said, of our alumni more generally. And one of the places, it seems to me, where we could be doing that is really bringing them into federal service in a variety of different ways.

But I wanted to ask all of you: Do you all agree that we should be extending, first of all, noncompetitive eligibility for all national service positions? And if you were to do that, how long would you do it for? Because I think your point about one year is not enough, three years is a better number. It gives them an opportunity to sort of explore options and figure out what they want, and I'm curious as to what you think is the right number, in a sense. So, do you all agree to extend it? What would be the right length of time?



But also, do you see it as a major incentive for service, you know, in the context of the various positions that you're talking about in AmeriCorps and otherwise? And I know the VISTA members do have it for a year, but it's really not across the board the way, obviously, you were proposing in your testimony.

So please, however you want to

Ms. Barbara Stewart

So, we unfortunately have unequal treatment to our AmeriCorps members. VISTA does get the eligibility; our other two programs don't. So, making that more consistent would be useful.

You know, I think it's a benefit of participating in these programs. I also think it's a benefit to the Federal Government. It's a way of identifying pre identifying talent. As I think you all are more aware than I am because of your research, we're going to need more talent in the Federal Government.

So, and it feels to me like extending for a couple of years doesn't cost us anything. It creates more likelihood that someone will take advantage of that. And why do you want them to take advantage of that? Because we want former Peace Corps and AmeriCorps members to serve in the Federal Government.

So, it seems very logical to me, and it is a benefit of participation, but I wouldn't say it's a driver of participation. It's something that people appreciate as they're concluding their service.

Ms. Avril Haines

Okay.

Mr. Chris Bugbee



I think it gives us another tool to recruit, and so I think in that way it's powerful. And you do you know, as Barbara is saying, you have an individual who has demonstrated that they are inclined to serve, and so it seems like it would be a good fit for a federal position.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

I would just I agree with everything that's been said. Definitely extend it to all national service folks and, at minimum, three years, because, you know, you come out of if you're dealing with illness or a family emergency or something and you don't get around to the next step right away. But I agree with all of it.

And I think not enough people know about it, and so I do think it's a tool, and we do have to do a better job of communicating about it.

Ms. Michelle Brooks

And I'll just comment. For us, the reason that we came up with the three years is because that is what is now provided to Peace Corps employees, so that was a way to extend that to the volunteers.

Mr. Pierre Nguyen

I mean, our members already serve with some national federal partners, so with the National Forest Service, the National Park Service. And, you know, they've been tested. They've, you know, proven that they can work in that capacity.

So, I think I am also for it, and I think that is just an easier pathway for them to get into the career that they want to get into. You know, they have to do roundabout ways to get into the Federal Government sometimes because there is there is no marker or flag for them to be identified as, hey, I've served. I've already served with you guys before.



Dr. Janine Davidson

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Ms. Skelly?

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Less preamble this time for me.

Let's talk about what we've come to understand is a significant challenge for volunteers while they serve, housing. We've heard that in some of the significant urban areas that we've visited.

What strategies whoever wants to lean forward first, but what strategies could be used to mitigate the burden of housing upon those who currently serve?

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah, I mean, I think the first thing, if we can increase the living allowance, that would be extremely helpful. And a lot of our programs already have some kind of wraparound service that they're providing to members to try to help them. But I think the living allowance, increasing that would help significantly.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

And untaxing it.



Mr. Chris Bugbee

Untaxing it, yes.

Ms. AnnMaura Connolly

While we're increasing it, let's get rid of that tax too.

The other thing I would say is that VISTA actually has an emergency assistance you can provide emergency assistance on a one time or multi time basis to VISTA members when they have some sort of destabilizing situation with their housing, and that should be extended to all AmeriCorps members; and I would assume Peace Corps has a different set of challenges around housing.

But there are some really interesting, innovative ideas out there. There's this thing called Silvernest I just learned about, where older folks are looking at bringing younger people or bringing in sort of renters, and that, I think, is a rich vein for us to be thinking about, whether we can create some national partnerships.

We also need they are often short time short term housing crises with our AmeriCorps members, so they may end up realizing I can't afford that place or I'm in an unhealthy roommate situation. And so, partnerships with folks like Airbnb, I think, could be helpful in mitigating some of those circumstances.

And definitely the living allowance just needs to be increased, and we need to be thinking about the living allowance in the context of cost of living. So, if you're doing your service in New York City, it's a whole different deal than if you're doing it in a, you know, a smaller, maybe more rural place where housing costs are not so high. So, I think it needs to be tiered.



Mr. Pierre Nguyen

Yeah. Being from New York, I understand the astronomical prices of housing.

As Ms. Connolly talked about, there are shorter term AmeriCorps programs as well. And I don't want to misspeak on City Year, but I understand that some City Year programs, they have partnerships with local apartment complexes to kind of to negotiate down some of those prices.

And so I think one of the biggest things that really will contribute to this is the branding of a national image and also figuring out strategies for incentives for apartment complexes to consider AmeriCorps members for those shorter terms or some incentives to allow AmeriCorps members to be able to have that consistent stream for them, the ones that are serving in those cities, to come into those apartment complexes.

Additionally, at the local city level, we've created some networks with other AmeriCorps members to live together, to serve together well, ones that are serving, not necessarily in the same AmeriCorps programs. But it still becomes a challenge because the cost of living is pretty is pretty significant. As Ms. Connolly had stated, I think doing a tiered system would be helpful in that aspect.

Ms. Barbara Stewart

And just to support what you're suggesting, Commissioner, we see in programs that provide housing, which some of our programs do, or programs that provide additional supportive services, be it transportation or other services, that their participants are far more likely to stay in the program. The attrition rate is very different.

These are challenges, so but the programs that have addressed them have had a lot more success. We have good statistics to show that.



Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Mr. Khazei.

Mr. Alan Khazei

I want to go back to something that, Chris, you said earlier about the fellowship program; and I really appreciate, Barbara, your emphasis on streamlining transformation and trying to prioritize tribal communities, rural communities.

And I want to build off something that my fellow commissioner Jeanette asked about getting more support to some of the rural communities or opportunities. A number of you talked about that.

So, one of the things and you brought up the fellowship program, which is in the Serve America Act, but it's never been funded. And I think partially with the challenges of funding you know, is the budget going to be there or not? And also, I don't think the stipend is pretty low for that as well.

So, we are looking at should there be a service fellowship program or a renewed one that could get into more low income or rural communities; that don't have large nonprofits that have capacity; could get opportunity youth work in their neighborhoods with more community-based nonprofits.

So, if we were going to do that and I guess I'd start with you, Chris, but anybody can because you run a program in a huge state with a real diversity of communities. How would you design that? You think it's a good idea; you brought it up. How would you design it? What's the



value of that? And how would you guarantee that the work was of value; that there was some accountability?

Because if you had a fellowship, you know, it goes to the person. And, I mean, one thought we've had been use technology. I mean, we have rating systems using technology for everything. But we'd love your thoughts on if we were going to suggest that, how do we make it work and why is it compelling?

Mr. Chris Bugbee

Yeah, I think we thought of it. We administer a VISTA intermediary project, and so we've thought of it in a similar way, where having that kind of fellowship program.

It also could be the ability for state service commissions to manage a grant themselves to have the ability to place members, have that flexibility, but just the ability to take one or two members that you can place in smaller organizations to be able to do direct service.

It's very confusing, I think, for some organizations to understand what can a VISTA member do? What can an AmeriCorps member do? And what they really need, sometimes they can't get. And so, we spend a lot of our time on the compliance side and navigating those kinds of discussions.

So, the more flexibility we can have in the kind of design of the program like does it matter if that individual is helping serve or if they're helping the organization design a fundraising plan? You know, do we have to be that restrictive? And when we're talking about the rural programs, they might need people to wear multiple hats. And so, I think the more flexibility that we can have, I think, the better.

In Texas we've had to set some kind of minimums where organizations who apply for an AmeriCorps program need to apply for about 20 in order to make it worth the administrative burden. So, in an organization that's rural, they can't take on 20 members, and so just having that



ability to place a few members to be able just to have that flexibility would be, I think, very impactful.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Terrific.

Barbara, you have thoughts?

Ms. Barbara Stewart

I love this idea. I mean, it's such a great way of expanding the number of organizations who can take advantage of the resource.

Accountability is the challenge, right, how do you figure out where people are going and what they're doing. But as you suggested, technology allows us to address that. We could pilot this in a way that you got a feel for it.

I've had some conversations with also with the state commissions about how they might serve as an intermediary to place individuals in direct service as opposed to the confusion that Chris was saying around who's a VISTA, what can a VISTA do, versus who's a member and what they can you know, an AmeriCorps member, what they can do.

It would require a robust process, but it feels to me like the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

Mr. Alan Khazei

All right. Thank you.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Well, Ms. Brooks, Mr. Bugbee, Ms. Connolly, Mr. Nguyen, Ms. Stewart, thank you so much. We greatly appreciate your time today and for the valuable information that you've provided to this commission. We'll now dismiss the panelists from the witness table. You're welcome to take seats there in the front row, if you like. And we'll invite the public to provide comments.

The commission is committed to transparency and openness with the public. In keeping with these principles, the commission intends to provide the public with an opportunity to deliver public comments during our hearings.

As a reminder, in order to provide the greatest opportunity for as many participants to offer a comment as would like, public comment is limited to a two-minute period per person. As was noted on our website, sign up for public comment took place between the opening of registration and the start of this hearing.

When you signed up you received a numbered ticket. To ensure fairness, tickets were randomly drawn. We will call out five ticket numbers at a time and ask that, when your number is called, please come forward and make a line behind the microphone located to my right, your left, and provide your comment. Also, on the easel to my right, you will see the ticket numbers in the order that you should line up. If time does not permit you to offer your oral comment, we encourage you to submit your written comment at our website, www.inspire2serve.gov. Additionally, if you have any written statements that you would like to submit for the record, please provide them to the staff at the registration desk.

I now invite the following ticketed individuals to provide comments: Numbers 6008, 6015, 6011, 6014, and 6009. So, if you have those ticket numbers, please line up at the mic. Don't be bashful.



During your comment, please be aware of the lights over here at the end of the witness table. The light will turn yellow when you have 30 seconds remaining and red when time is expired; at this time, you'll also hear a buzzer.

Please introduce yourself to the commission with your name and affiliation before starting your comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Jaclyn Kolar

Hello, good morning. My name is Jaclyn Kolar. I am the manager of AmeriCorps Texas at OneStar Foundation.

I care a lot about national service. I am a two-time AmeriCorps alum, worked at an AmeriCorps program for several years and have been at the commission now for four years. So near and dear to my heart.

I just wanted to provide and offer some examples from within our AmeriCorps Texas portfolio for some of the ideas that were discussed today to give you an idea of how these might look specifically on the ground.

One of the things that came up in a variety of questions was how to engage young Americans in service. I think one of the most successful models we've seen is within our programs at our college access programs.

So, we have four college access programs in our portfolio; all of them to some extent have really taken advantage of this pipeline of former service beneficiaries then becoming AmeriCorps members in their program. So, we're seeing this pipeline of early introduction to service, exposure to service; and then, through this sort of near peer model of college access



programs, members are then you know, individuals are deciding to serve in these programs. So that's an exciting opportunity, I think.

Another one in terms of early introduction is there was talk about, you know, at what point during school to introduce service. We have an AmeriCorps program with a school district here,

Amarillo Independent School District. They have a program designed around using high school seniors as tutors in their elementary schools. It's been a really exciting program to see.

Obviously, this is 45 high school seniors. Trying to scale that on a national or statewide level, there's some barriers there. But I think there's something there to explore and see different ways to use that. That program, in addition to those students that are serving as members serving in these elementary schools, they're also taking a class as part of their high school curriculum on career readiness and service learning as well. So, I think there are some opportunities there.

And then the last thing I wanted to mention, as we talked about different ways of engaging the idea of a summer a term of summer service came up. Of our portfolio, we have 3,200 members that serve every year in our state; about a quarter of those are summer term positions. And so, we have several programs that have really looked at this model of using a term of service over the summer specifically for engaging, typically, high school seniors or college students as well. And so, I know that it came up getting the service bug. This seems to be a great way to engage them early in a lifetime of service.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you so much for your comment and for being here today.

Ms. Jaclyn Kolar

Thank you.



Ms. Sonia Hernandez

Hi. Good morning, Chairman and Commissioners. My name is Sonia Hernandez. I've been with AmeriCorps for three terms, and I've been deployed four times throughout the United States and United States territories.

So, my comment was, since I've been deployed four times, I've noticed a lack of diversity, not only through women of color but through genders as well. And you guys were talking about how we can get more diverse people into the program.

In Austin there is a program for the Park Ranger Cadet program, and we just had a summit for them yesterday and a lot of that program is out of one high school in Austin and some of those students' Interior America program and Conservation World, and some of those alumns go back into the park parks program. And I know that that helped out because there was alumns through the Texas Conservation program going onwards.

Also, I know that within my culture, going back to the community is kind of seen as a privilege and also kind of a culture construct, where it's a privilege to work in the community and to do your service, to even go to parks sometimes because you have to pay for it. And growing up for me, I know I wasn't able to do that, but now giving back into the AmeriCorps program, I'm able to visit these parks that I wasn't allowed to.

So, as we hopefully rebrand the AmeriCorps label, we need to reconstruct the effects of giving back to the community and seeing that it's it also helps us as an individual and as our environment.

Also, increasing the living stipend and taking the taxation away from the ed award because I just did my taxes for the first time as AmeriCorps, and I didn't realize I had to pay back a little bit. So, I know you can only give some certain amount without giving paying back, and the living stipend doesn't always give me that amount to pay back with living stably.



And also, just maybe as rebranding, giving a day where it's like a park free day or out day where some of the parks that we have to pay for are free and that people who are in different culturally diverse communities be able to experience this, and not see it as so much as a privilege but as a way to just grow. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Mr. Parc Smith

All right. Thank you, Commission and Commissioners, for having this hearing today. We're honored to be a part of this discussion.

My name is Parc Smith. I'm with the American YouthWorks and the Texas and Louisiana Conservation Corps doing disaster relief and conservation work across our nation's public lands, and we also run a YouthBuild program.

And so, 24 years I've been involved in national service, since really the beginning of AmeriCorps. I was involved in this program, and now I'm CEO, and I'm getting to see how this plays out across the nation.

What's been phenomenal to me to see is the opportunity that we have been able to create particularly for opportunity youth, where young people who don't really have a clear career path, may not have even completed their high school diploma, can come through a program like YouthBuild, can get connected to education, but can find their own self-worth through service to their community.

When you ask a young person to do something significant for others, to really step beyond themselves, sometimes they're worried about where they're going to sleep tonight, how they're going to kind of keep food on the table in their own homes.



But continuing to look at the national service model and inserting flexibility into the completion dates, as AnnMaura Connolly was mentioning earlier, finding ways to incentivize programs to work with more challenged youth populations we've seen so many of these young people, they've completed their education. They've moved on. They've done service. They've moved on to college when they didn't think they had an opportunity to go to college. The AmeriCorps ed award really removes that barrier and breaks down that door so they can step in.

Beyond that, they then move into career pathways, many into public service. A lot of our YouthBuild members have moved into military service, and but then the public service side is going on to become wildland firefighters, moving into emergency management jobs with the counties and cities with which we've partnered in these communities when disasters happen.

So, this stream that you guys are having this conversation of all three types of service and how it improves our country, it's a really important conversation, and I applaud you for really spending so much time on this effort for these past two years. Thank you for your work.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Joshua Winata

Good morning. My name is Joshua Winata. I'm communications officer with OneStar Foundation.

I just wanted to there's been a lot of discussion today about promoting and raising awareness about AmeriCorps national service on the national stage, and so I just wanted to acknowledge one of the challenges as someone who has been trying to promote national service on the Texas level, is especially when you're looking at kind of the larger scale, is that national service represents a diversity of issues, and the experience looks very different depending on the



program. You could be sitting with a student. You could be making spreadsheets. You could be building a trail. And as a result, it is very different to kind of succinctly promote, and you often end up with a very fragmented image of what national service can be and when it comes to promoting and marketing national service.

CNCS, Service Year, the state commissions have all done a really great job of putting together some very beautiful campaigns that show the impact of service overall and build kind of excitement for service. But one thing that especially speaking with a lot of members is national service is really just a vessel. It's and there's kind of a lot of mental jumps to make from, you know, that it's not so much that they're enamored with the idea of national service; it's that they care about a specific issue.

And so, one thing I just wanted to propose to this commission, as you guys are developing your recommendations around prompting national service, is to have a very kind of targeted marketing strategy. I really like the idea of working with ideas of higher education with institutions of higher education, to work with specific majors, because it really is kind of the issue-based marketing that you also get a lot of results with.

And also, to continue offering training and technical assistance to local programs. A lot of the recruitment does have to come from a local level so that they can kind of generate interest around specific issues.

And finally, just really focus on storytelling. I think a lot of it has been very ambiguous in general about what service is but focusing on individual stories that let people see what service looks like.

So, thank you all for your time.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you. The next five, 6010, 6012, 6007, 6013, and 6016, if you want to come forward. Again, please introduce yourself and any affiliation you might have and then offer your comment.

Mr. Patrick Doucette

Hello, my name is Patrick Doucette, and I've been a part of national service I was a state and national volunteer for one summer, and then I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Costa Rica, so I definitely have a large appreciation of national service.

And in terms of branding, so on the news you often hear about a disaster or other issues in a country. Well, wouldn't it be interesting if, along with reporting the news, a news reporter said, "And if you would like to spend a year doing something about disasters" or whatever this issue is "you could be an NCCC volunteer" or something like that.

I think there are a lot of young people who are very passionate about things, and if attached to their news story, they were able to see opportunities where they could really address that issue, I think that would be really meaningful.

So also, all the things that we've talked about today are really great. There are plenty of issues in our country with division and things, and what a better way to bridge that by having Americans come together to meet important needs.

And unfortunately, I've been dismayed to see budget proposals of cutting funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service, and I see too that it's proposing to return funding to the private and nonprofit sectors. And I just hope that the Administration can be made aware of the importance of this, and I think it will be very difficult for those sectors to adopt a billion dollars of funding. So, I hope that that's something that can change in the future. Thank you.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you.

Mr. Alexander Lam

Hello, my name is Alex Lam. I'm a former AmeriCorps member in Los Angeles and a current student at The Bush School of Government and Public Service sitting, in part, in international development.

One issue that I think is important is the issue of access for people who want to serve but who financial issues may be a sticking point. On my team in AmeriCorps, lots of maybe two thirds of my team was in that category, where it was more difficult for them to serve; however, because they were of low income, they were more able to connect with the problems in situations that people in low income communities have.

I'm not exactly sure how to improve the access, which is, of course, your job, I suppose. But it is a critical issue. Of course, we need to balance that with not making sure that well, making sure that the beneficiaries and the team members are exposed to a diverse set of minds so that it doesn't silo people off from one another, to help create this sense of community. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you so much.

Ms. Ashley Alley

Hello. My name is Ashley Alley. I'm also a current Bush School student, and I'm very excited to play a small part in this commission, so thank you for coming.



The issue that I'm most concerned about was actually talked about quite in depth today, but I'd like to reiterate again that importance of bridging that gap between the military and national service aspects.

If we truly believe that all of us wanting to serve our country are playing on the same team, I think that holistic approach of vital importance. For me, as somebody who wants to go into public service, nothing douses the fire of my desire to do so quite like rejection.

And particularly, as we talked about, so many individuals are ineligible to serve in the military; rather than viewing that as a closed door, it would be wonderful if recruiters were more encouraged and aware of the opportunities in national service and were proactively encouraging people to look for those other opportunities. Not only would it unify us as a country, in our ability to serve, but I think it would basically fan the flame of the desire to serve our country, to really understand that we're all on the same team, we're all looking for the same things, and to feel like we support each other no matter what component we're currently involved in. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you so much.

Ms. Kimberly Rinardsky

Hello. My name is Kimberly Rinardsky, and I'm a proud Bush School student currently and a City of Orlando alumni from 2018.

I would just like to echo the sentiments of Ms. Connolly about the focus moving forward with national service. Her concern summarized my individual experience with City Year very well.



One thing I wanted to mention specifically, based on my individual experiences with City Year Orlando, in regards to the question about whether national service should focus on growth or should focus on improving the programs that they already have, was that in the program that I was in, we had about 60 City Year members at the time, and throughout the year we lost at least 10 of them. And so that was from a variety of factors, whether they be related to housing or transportation or even kind of a hostile work environment on the team.

But I also think in some ways the managers we had four managers in our program were a little bit afraid to like reprimand or discipline some of our my coworkers because they were in such need for people on their teams to serve the communities that they did not want to get rid of anyone for or they did not want to reprimand them or make them I don't know feel unwelcome in any way that might push them to be one of those, you know, 10 people that eventually quit.

And so I think that improving or spending more money maybe improving the programs that we already have would be beneficial so that we wouldn't have such a we would retain more people or more AmeriCorps members and that they would be less likely to quit over the course of their service year. Thank you very much.

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you.

Ms. Karina Hernandez

Hello. My name is Karina Hernandez. I'm the director of community relations at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston Houston. I've been in the volunteer world for the past 20 years, started off as a volunteer, now I'm managing volunteer programs.

And AmeriCorps members are wonderful. Last year at Catholic Charities we had a little over eight members, so we had disaster recovery, refugee resettlement, and we help homeless



female veterans and male and female veterans on the brink of homelessness. So, we've had AmeriCorps, VISTA members, Peer Navigator members, in all different areas of our agency.

I'm glad what was brought up was about the living allowance, housing. One AmeriCorps member that we had last year she was in disaster resiliency it wasn't enough. She did find a home for a bit. She shared a house with three two more people, and it wasn't a healthy living environment.

And, of course especially what was brought up about where they are serving, Houston, it's not that cheap depending where you're located. And so, there are some apartments that are, of course, lower cost, but they're not in the best areas.

And so, she was a Navy veteran. And she called me. She's like, "Karina, I'm moving out. It's not healthy for me here." And so, I said, "Okay, well" she had to stay with me for at least a month until she was able to get her own place. So, I really do appreciate that that is something you're looking into, to raising the stipend, the living allowance, and depending, of course, where they're serving.

And I really do appreciate also that you're looking into service for the summer. During the summertime, Catholic Charities, we get a lot of high schoolers. And, of course, we have them from different from private schools, public schools. So especially the children who probably cannot afford to they want to go to college but they can't afford it, so maybe even a small education award, you know, if you serve this many hours during the summer, you get this small award that will go towards your college education.

So hopefully that's an incentive for them to okay, I'm going to have something saved so I can hopefully maybe go to a community college. So that would be again, that's a great idea, and I hope that's something that you continue looking into. Thank you.



Dr. Joseph Heck

Thank you so much.

Well, that's the last of the ticketed questions, but we still have some time remaining, so at this time, if you were unable to put your name on a ticket because you arrived late or you've been inspired by what you've heard here today to have a comment, please come on up to the mic.

If you've already shared a public comment, however, please do not come back up. This time is for individuals who were not accounted for toward the ticket drawing.

So, anybody else who would like to make a public comment?

Ms. Ana Staymates

My name is Ana Staymates. I'm currently a Bush School student here. I'm also a two-time AmeriCorps alum, one as an AmeriCorps VISTA and one as a state and national.

So just to address a couple of the questions that you all had, in particular the incentive for the one year. I personally find it a little bit ironic that we're only allowed to have one year when the jobs that we would be applying for require an advanced degree.

So as a VISTA, I had a bachelor's degree; however, I had one year to use that particular perk, and I needed a master's degree for the jobs that I was interested in, and my degree takes two years. So therefore, just by trying to be qualified for that job, I could not take advantage of that perk.

Additionally, I wanted to mention the living stipend, of course, is one of the things when I try and convince people to be in AmeriCorps, it's a huge barrier. Because to be honest, I used



savings as an AmeriCorps to be able to serve, and as a first-generation student who came from a low-income family to begin, I didn't have a lot of money to start with. And I had to use my reserves just to be able to be in AmeriCorps and serve, and that to me seems like a pretty significant barrier. Especially because these are the individuals you want to be involved in what you're doing because they are the ones who really do truly understand the beneficiaries and where they're coming from because we have lived that life experience as well.

So, I just wanted to share some of those comments, and I'd like to thank you all for coming today and being able to do this process.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Dr. Joseph Heck

Great. Thank you so much.

Anyone else? Okay.

So, if after you leave here today you come up with a comment that you wish you would have provided while we were here, please submit it via our website, again, www.inspire2serve.gov. We will be collecting public comments through December 31st of this year when the public comment period is going to close.

And before we adjourn the hearing, I would like all those who are prior national service program members and volunteers, AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, anybody who has served in the military, please stand to be recognized.

[Applause.]



Thank you. I again want to thank our panelists for providing their testimony today and all those in the audience who took the time to attend today's proceedings. It is only with your help and input that the commission will achieve its vision of every American inspired and eager to serve.

There being no further business before the commission, this hearing is adjourned.

[Bangs gavel at 1137.]

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