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**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** ★★☆☆

THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL
AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Strategic Plan

2011-2015



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Executive Summary

People—diverse, passionate and committed—make America strong. Through national service and volunteering, Americans from all walks of life contribute to their communities and the nation. Today’s social and economic challenges are complex and require comprehensive, integrated and innovative approaches to shape solutions that work. Engaged citizens are at the center of these solutions.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) empowers and supports Americans to tackle persistent challenges such as helping youth succeed in school, securing safe affordable housing for economically disadvantaged families, or helping communities respond to disasters. Through this work, CNCS achieves its mission of improving lives, strengthening communities and fortifying the civic health of our nation.

CNCS, a federal agency, brings leadership, resources, coordination, focus, and scale to America’s voluntary sector. Our programs unite the passion, commitment and talent of participants with the assets of community organizations and the funding from public and private sectors to build enduring community capacity to solve problems. CNCS supports a network of state service commissions, intermediary organizations, grantees and sponsors (the national service network) through which millions of Americans help the most vulnerable citizens, improve their neighborhoods, and transform their own lives. As a result of the network, citizen-centered solutions take root, are sustained, and transform communities and the nation.

For more than 45 years, successive Administrations of both parties have made investments in national service to engage citizens in solving problems and build the

capacity of America’s voluntary sector. Sixteen years ago, Congress created CNCS to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet pressing national and community needs, based on common-sense principles of local control, competition, accountability, leveraging of non-federal resources, and public-private partnership.

Through AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, Senior Corps and our other programs and activities, five million Americans serve with nearly 70,000 organizations in the national service network. These organizations use national service resources to develop innovative solutions across a broad spectrum of issues.

In recognition of this successful foundation, Congress in 2009 passed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Serve America Act) to bring national service to higher levels of impact, innovation and effectiveness. This landmark law, which passed with strong bipartisan support, is an inflection point for CNCS and the foundation for our Strategic Plan. The law directs CNCS to expand opportunities to serve, build the capacity of individuals, nonprofits and communities, and encourage innovative approaches to addressing community challenges. The law puts a strong emphasis on focusing national service on a core set of priority issue areas and measuring the impact of service, and this directive is a guiding force for our Strategic Plan.

We have an opportunity to leverage the effective programs of the national service network to drive toward a specific set of results on critical national issues. We will produce these results by investing in effective local initiatives, engaging more Americans in service, supporting evidence-based programs, and leveraging public-private partnerships.

To focus our efforts, CNCS has the following four strategic goals. These goals are the foundation for our Strategic Plan. They also challenge us to lead and operate at the highest level of accountability, integrity and transparency.

1. Increase the impact of national service on community needs in communities served by CNCS-supported programs

CNCS invests in community programs and projects that achieve outcomes in Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. Going forward, our new investments will focus on achieving a specific set of outcomes in these areas.

2. Strengthen national service so that participants engaged in CNCS-supported programs consistently find satisfaction, meaning and opportunity

CNCS supports the national service network in providing experiences that offer a unique combination of professional, educational and life benefits to service participants. The network also recruits a diversity of Americans, especially those from underrepresented populations. We will collaborate with the national service network to strengthen outreach efforts in underserved communities and to implement best practices that ensure a powerful service experience.

3. Maximize the value we add to grantees, partners and participants

To support our focus on a specific set of community outcomes and a powerful service experience, CNCS will develop a relevant and accessible knowledge base informed by research and rigorous evaluation, and conduct capacity building activities that advance the adoption of best practices.

4. Fortify management operations and sustain a capable, responsive and accountable organization

We will work across programs and enhance our operations to support evidence-based decision making and a culture of performance. We will build upon our current infrastructure to strengthen and enhance our information technology systems, workforce and financial and grants management efforts.

As the blueprint guiding our work, the Strategic Plan includes further details on the specific objectives, strategies and performance measures which determine how we will evaluate our success over the next five years.



Environmental Context

America's story is the story of service—people who step forward to change lives and strengthen our nation. The needs of communities are pressing and complex. They require comprehensive, integrated and innovative solutions. CNCS and the national service network are important elements of community solutions. Our work is informed by the following contextual factors:

Leaders at the local, state and national level are calling upon national service.

Governors and mayors are embracing the potential of service to address community needs. In 2011, Governors Nathan Deal of Georgia, Sam Brownback of Kansas and Deval Patrick of Massachusetts made “days of service” a centerpiece of their inaugurations. They asked citizens to join them in feeding the hungry, assisting the jobless, and helping their neighbors in a host of other ways. Some governors have elevated the role of state service commissions and others have made service a cabinet level position. More than 100 mayors of cities large and small are part of the Cities of Service coalition and have pledged to engage citizens to address local priorities.

Service is a cost-effective investment in community solutions.

In times of fiscal restraint and significant community challenges, leveraging and investing in the national service network is a smart strategy that taps the energy and ingenuity of our greatest resource—the American people—to help solve pressing problems. In FY 2009, participants in CNCS programs gave almost 263 million hours of service.¹

As the nation's largest funder of service and volunteering, CNCS plays a vital role in building the capacity of America's nonprofit community, expanding the impact of service participants in addressing problems, and strengthening the American culture of civic engagement.

Community organizations are in need of human capital and other resources.

Nonprofit organizations are often in the lead on delivering community solutions. Unfortunately, nonprofits—including those organizations that leverage national service resources—are struggling to keep up with an increasing demand for services during a time of steep decline in public and private giving. Many nonprofits have experienced and are expecting continuing cuts in revenue. To mitigate this trend, CNCS-supported participants can play a role in leveraging community volunteers to serve alongside them. In fact, in FY 2010, over 81,000 AmeriCorps members served in communities across the nation and mobilized an estimated 2.8 million additional volunteers—roughly 35 leveraged volunteers per AmeriCorps member.²

Americans throughout the country are volunteering their time and skills in record numbers.

In 2009, 63.4 million Americans volunteered to help their communities. This is an additional 1.6 million people who volunteered compared to 2008, making 2009 the largest single-year increase since 2003, according to CNCS' 2010 *Volunteering In America* report. Volunteering increased among all racial and ethnic groups.³ Baby boomers today are volunteering at rates as much as 50 percent greater

1. Compiled from grant applications and progress reports: State and National—budgeted member service years from grant applications; Senior Corps—actual hours served, from the supplemental progress reports; Learn and Serve—actual hours served, from LASSIE; VISTA—calculated from counts of enrolled members; NCCC—taken from project reports.

2. 2010 Annual Financial Report, http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/11_1115_final_fy_10_afr.pdf.

3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Volunteering in the United States (2009).

than in past decades.⁴ Today's young people are serving at twice the rate of the generation before them. Last year more college freshmen than ever before reported that volunteering in the community is important to them.⁵

CNCS and the network of organizations we support are uniquely positioned to tap this growing demand for and supply of citizen service in the next five years. We plan to take the opportunity and focus our resources and efforts on a core set of challenges. As a result, we will strive to demonstrate tangible impact on beneficiaries of service, the lives of service participants, and on communities across the nation.

4. Foster-Bey, J, Grimm, R, & Dietz, N. Keeping Baby Boomers Volunteering. *Corporation for National and Community Service* (2007).

5. Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., DeAngelo, L., Palucki Blake, L., & Tran, S. *The American freshman: National norms fall 2009*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA (2009).



CNCS Mission and Agency Overview

We are the federal agency that provides pathways and opportunities for Americans to engage in their communities. Our mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

CNCS' primary role is to provide critical resources and leadership to support local initiatives that tackle community challenges. We do this by directing resources to those organizations and community programs that have proven to be effective in using service at the local level to address the key priorities of Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. Through AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, Senior Corps and our other programs and activities, five million Americans serve with nearly 70,000 organizations in the national service network.

We implement direct service programs, make grants, provide capacity-building and support to nonprofits, conduct research and evaluation to inform best practices, provide

thought leadership,⁶ and foster collaboration with other federal agencies, foundations, community organizations, and state, local and tribal governments. CNCS adds further value through our focus on the quality of the service participant's experience and continued engagement.

Successive Administrations of both parties have recognized the importance of volunteers in addressing key issues and made investments in national service⁷ to build the capacity of America's voluntary sector. Most recently in April 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the Serve America Act, which amended the national service laws to reauthorize CNCS and expand its scope and programs. This landmark bill, which passed with bipartisan support, is the foundation for our Strategic Plan. The legislation authorizes CNCS to focus on key issues, expand opportunities to serve, build the capacity of individuals, nonprofits and communities, and encourage innovative approaches to addressing community challenges.

6. *Thought leadership is defined as the content, speeches, publications and reports that provide our perspective on the context, challenges and opportunities facing CNCS, our grantees, sponsors and partners, and the national service field in order to inform and influence the action of others.*

7. *Throughout the remainder of this document, "national service" is used for brevity as a way to refer to the service activities carried out by individuals and organizations supported by CNCS.*



Our Programs

Our work is carried out through the following programs that engage people from all communities and of all ages in service and volunteering—from one-day or occasional volunteering to an intensive year-long commitment.

Senior Corps consists of three programs—RSVP, Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and Senior Companion Program (SCP)—that use the experience, skills and talents of more than 450,000 volunteers age 55 and older to serve at-risk youth, help seniors live independently and meet other community needs. Senior Corps volunteers serve through more than 65,000 local nonprofits, public agencies, faith-based and other community organizations.

AmeriCorps provides opportunities for more than 80,000 Americans each year to provide intensive results-driven service to respond to natural disasters, expand economic opportunity, strengthen education, protect the environment, enable access to health services, support veterans and military families, and meet other critical needs. AmeriCorps members serve in thousands of nonprofit, faith-based and other local organizations through three programs: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps). AmeriCorps members—and the nearly three million volunteers they recruit and supervise—tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, operate afterschool programs, help veterans readjust to civilian life, and help communities respond to disasters.

Learn and Serve America provides opportunities for more than 1.3 million students every year to strengthen communities, enhance education and develop an enduring

ethic of service for youth. We fund state education agencies, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, Indian tribes and U. S. territories, and institutions of higher education to develop, support and sustain high quality service-learning programs. This teaching and learning strategy integrates community service with classroom learning, enriching academic experiences and promoting civic engagement.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) targets public and private dollars to expand effective solutions across three issue areas: Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures and Youth Development. The SIF is a competitive grant program that invests in innovative solutions with evidence of impact and that are ready to grow to meet the needs of more communities. This work will create a catalog of evidence-based approaches that can be replicated in communities across the country.

The Volunteer Generation Fund strengthens the role of volunteers in tackling pressing problems by expanding the capacity of state service commissions and volunteer connector organizations to recruit, manage, support and retain individuals to serve in high-quality volunteer assignments.

The Call to Service engages citizens in service opportunities that expand the impact of community organizations and encourage volunteers to develop their own “do-it-yourself” projects. Each year, annual service days, such as the MLK Day of Service and the 9/11 National Day of Remembrance and Service, mobilize millions of Americans to become active participants in community solutions.



Strategic Goals and Strategy

OVERVIEW OF OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Moving forward on the course directed by the national service laws, CNCS has developed the following strategic goals and objectives illustrated in the figure below. Our four strategic goals are aligned with the key constituents whom we serve and through whom we accomplish results, namely:

MISSION STATEMENT

Improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

GOAL 1

Increase the impact of national service on community needs in communities served by CNCS-supported programs

GOAL 2

Strengthen national service so that participants engaged in CNCS-supported programs consistently find satisfaction, meaning and opportunity

SERVE AMERICA ACT FOCUS AREAS

Disaster Services
Economic Opportunity
Education
Environmental Stewardship
Healthy Futures
Veterans and Military Families

CNCS PROGRAMS

GOAL 3

Maximize the value we add to grantees, partners and participants

GOAL 4

Fortify management operations and sustain a capable, responsive and accountable organization

- Service recipients, the Americans who directly benefit from the efforts of national service participants.
- National service participants, those individuals who are engaged in national service activities in communities across the country.⁸
- Effective nonprofits, including state service commissions, CNCS grantees and sponsors, those organizations through which we provide national service resources and to which we provide additional services including capacity building, training and technical assistance.⁹
- CNCS staff, CNCS employees who monitor and support the activities undertaken by national service participants engaged in programs and the organizations through which they serve.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Across our strategic goals, there is a set of core principles that shape and guide how we do our work, which are rooted in our collaboration with the national service network.

Core Principle #1: Identify and invest in community solutions.

CNCS believes that many of the best solutions come from outside Washington, D.C., where people are finding ways to solve problems in their communities. CNCS program participants serve through more than 70,000 organizations, from national nonprofits to small faith-based and community groups. In 2010 they mobilized more than 3.5 million volunteers to engage in results-driven service for these organizations.¹⁰

We work closely with state service commissions to support citizen-centered community solutions. For example, at least 35.3 percent of AmeriCorps State and National funds go to states through formula funds and an additional 30 percent is awarded through a national competition. We also work with national organizations, state education agencies and Indian tribes to identify and invest in local programs with place-based strategies that deliver tangible and measurable outcomes to the local community as well as service participants.

Core Principle #2: Engage Americans in service.

By engaging millions of Americans in service and volunteering, CNCS is strengthening civic engagement and democratic participation and building a diverse, committed network of engaged citizens. Through the AmeriCorps programs, individuals embark on a pathway to opportunity that engages them in year-long projects where they learn valuable skills, earn money for education and chart a course of lifelong citizen engagement. A longitudinal study has suggested that AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to be civically engaged; to go into public service careers such as teaching, public safety, social work and military service; and to volunteer in their communities.¹¹

The skills participants gain include both those specific to their service as well as general skills of leadership and problem-solving. Since 1994, AmeriCorps members have earned more than \$2 billion in Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards for training, to help pay for college or to pay back student loans.¹² Engaging Americans in service enables individuals to take action in their communities and contribute to solutions while developing skills and accessing new opportunities.

8. Our various programs refer to people who participate in national service in different ways, e.g., AmeriCorps members, Learn and Serve America participants and/or Senior Corps volunteers. In this document, we often use the broad term “participant” to encompass all programs.

9. Technical assistance includes creating a learning community, creating best practice toolkits and providing examples of what success will look like.

10. CNCS Performance Management Database System.

11. Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development, *Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in AmeriCorps*. Washington, D.C. (2006).

12. 2010 Annual Financial Report, http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/11_1115_final_fy_10_afr.pdf.

Core Principle #3: Support evidence-based programs.

With guidance from Congress through the Serve America Act, we are targeting our programming to demonstrate impact on critical community issues and to build on the base of effective national service programming. By understanding how community solutions can be effective in responding to community needs—and where national service can make the biggest difference—CNCS can direct resources to support the most effective programs and encourage their growth and expansion to those areas that are under-resourced, such as rural and Native American communities.

We continue to work with the national service network to establish a collective understanding of what works and why, based on evidence from well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental studies that demonstrate impact. Where appropriate, we also work to reproduce these evidence-based approaches and expand them to other communities. For example, the SIF awards grants to and works with intermediaries to direct resources to community-based nonprofit organizations that can validate and grow promising approaches to challenges facing local communities.

Core Principle #4: Leverage public-private partnerships.¹³

National service was established as a public-private partnership, encouraging investment in the form of matching funds and other resources from businesses, foundations and state and local agencies. For example, AmeriCorps VISTA members help nonprofits expand services, raise funds, develop new collaborations, measure impact, and create innovative and sustainable programs. In 2010, we enabled grantees, sponsors and projects to leverage \$800 million in funds and in-kind donations.¹⁴ These resources—in addition to CNCS grants, training and research—help nonprofit, faith-based and community

organizations across the nation expand their reach and better achieve their missions. We also encourage collaboration among organizations in order to reduce duplication of effort and ensure more effective approaches to solving complex problems.

The nation is facing significant challenges and as Americans look for ways to give back, CNCS is more critical than ever. These core principles complement our specific strategies, which together inform how we will accomplish our strategic goals.

13. The use of the terms “partner” and “partnership” throughout this document are not intended to convey any legal relationship. Where there is a legal implication we use the term “formal partnership.”

14. Data extracted and analyzed from eGrants. Includes budgeted matching amounts from grant applications, actual cost share for AmeriCorps VISTA projects, and dollars and in-kind donations raised by AmeriCorps VISTA members.

GOAL 1

Increase the impact of national service on community needs in communities served by CNCS-supported programs

We will continue to focus on opportunities where national service can make the greatest difference in communities across the country. The Serve America Act amended the national service laws and expected CNCS to strengthen the service network and address areas of need that CNCS has the capacity to address, including Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families.

I. RATIONALE

Our belief is that Americans can effectively respond to challenges by getting involved in their local communities through service, and that citizen-centered action often can drive community solutions. CNCS' unique value is a triple "bottom line" return on investment in terms of benefits to service recipients, service participants and the community in general. By deploying people to work on the toughest community challenges, national service contributes to community needs, helps to develop future leaders of America and builds community capacity to respond to problems.

Improving the educational outcomes of children is a priority for communities across the country. Thus, we have historically made large investments in education with over 40 percent of all our program funds targeted to that work.¹⁵ Over the years, our grantees and sponsors have developed service-based approaches to address needs in education and supplement the work of schools. We can

build on our investment in education by targeting effective programs to increase and expand the impact of service on educational outcomes.

Meeting the needs of veterans and military family members is also a civic priority. Unemployment rates among veterans are greater than those for civilians, military service members and their families redeem food stamps at twice the civilian rate, and there is increasing evidence that a child's development and well-being is affected by a parent's active duty deployment.¹⁶ Our work with veterans and military families is a developing area of focus for us. Although a few national service programs have historically supported veterans and military families, our current veterans and military families portfolio makes up less than one percent of the total programmatic funds awarded by CNCS.¹⁷ Thus, we will continue to invest in programs that serve veterans and military families, grow our knowledge base of how national service can best meet the needs of veterans and military families, support efforts that engage veterans who want to continue their service in new ways at home, and promote effective collaboration with our veterans, military family members and veteran-serving organizations.

While we focus on the strategies for education and veterans and military families in this Plan, we will also continue to invest in effective solutions in the other focus areas of Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Environmental Stewardship and Healthy Futures. Performance measurement will continue to evolve with experience in new focus areas, through on-going data definitions and through modernizing information technology systems to enhance data capture and analysis. The overviews of strategies and priority performance measures for all of the focus areas are in the Appendix.

15. Program data extracted and analyzed from eGrants and current as of October 21, 2010. The dollar figures are based on the amount of service, measured in member service years, which can be classified by issues area. The dollar amounts are normalized so that they equal the appropriated dollar amount for each program.

16. Yonkman, Mary, and John Bridgeland. All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, November (2009).

17. Ibid.

II. STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

EDUCATION

Provide, support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged people, especially children.

Many economically disadvantaged children and youth have difficulty succeeding in school. The dropout process begins with young children entering school ill-prepared, and too many are unable to catch up and perform at grade level. With the right support, all children can succeed. Engaging children in the early years and throughout their academic career helps ensure more children, youth and adults develop essential skills and an appreciation for learning. Our education strategy is grounded in this challenge and in our unique role as a service provider and capacity-builder for schools and communities.

When we examine the education interventions that lead to the best education outcomes for students in most need—increased instructional time, family involvement, smaller student-teacher ratios, better teachers—we can identify a common element. These kinds of policies promote personal attention by caring, capable adults devoting time and attention to a student.¹⁸ Personal attention from caring and capable adults is the reason we have a remarkable opportunity to improve education outcomes for students.

Well-implemented national service-supported efforts can lead to critical outcomes such as improved attendance, improved engagement in coursework, improved course completion, performance at grade level, performance on standardized tests, high school graduation, and persistence in college and university. Academic achievement—performance on standardized tests, high school or

college graduation—is premised on strong academic engagement—high levels of attendance, positive behavior in class, or on-time course completion. Our education programs support both academic achievement and engagement, but the large majority of our education grants and expertise are focused on engagement. Thus, we don't propose to solve the dropout crisis, but we do propose to help strategically address what precipitates it.

A chart outlining the education focus area strategy can be found in the Appendix. Below is an overview of our objectives, strategies and performance measures.

OBJECTIVE 1: Improve school readiness¹⁹ for economically disadvantaged young children.

Strategy:

- Focus funding activities and other resources on programs in which CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers develop or engage in proven or promising²⁰ activities that include teaching, tutoring and/or the provision of education-related supportive services for children or their families that improve school readiness.

Priority Measures:

- Percent of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of social and emotional development.
- Percent of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of literacy skills.
- Percent of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of numeracy (math) skills.

18. Other critical supports that correlate with improved education outcomes include living in safe, supportive housing, access to preventive health care and family economic supports. Those supports will not be addressed here but may be supported through other CNCS programs and focus areas such as the SIF, Economic Opportunity or Healthy Futures.

19. School readiness refers to preparation for kindergarten which includes multiple indicators assessed across developmental and behavioral domains, including but not limited to physical wellbeing, health and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, cognitive development, and age-appropriate skills and behaviors.

20. Promising practices have established a preliminary level of evidence to inform program interventions and strategies. Preliminary evidence is evidence that is based on a reasonable hypothesis supported by research findings (third-party or original). Proven practices have established at least a moderate level of evidence. Moderate evidence is evidence from independent evaluations of program impact that used an experimental or quasi-experimental research design. Both levels of evidence are further defined on page 25.

OBJECTIVE 2: Improve educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle and high schools.

Strategy:

- Focus funding and other resources on programs in which:
 - CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities intended to improve learning and grade-level success in low-achieving schools, such as teaching, tutoring and/or mentoring of students; providing supportive services to assist staff; providing extended learning programs in cooperation with school systems (such as after school and summer learning); or providing other types of school improvement support to school systems;
 - CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in high quality service-learning projects in low-achieving schools;
 - CNCS provides assistance to higher education institutions and alternative certification programs to increase the number of teachers or teaching aids working in low-achieving schools or otherwise provide assistance to community-based learning centers in high poverty communities; and
 - CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers provide proven or promising capacity-building services for state and local education agencies or community-based learning centers.

Priority Measures:

- Percent of students served by or serving in CNCS-supported programs²¹ who demonstrate improved

academic performance (including the percent meeting state proficiency levels in reading and math or whose scores on state standardized tests improved).

- Percent of students served by CNCS-supported programs, or engaged in CNCS-supported service-learning, who demonstrate improved academic engagement.

OBJECTIVE 3: Improve the preparation for, and prospects of success in, post-secondary education institutions for economically disadvantaged students.

Strategy:

- Focus funding activities and other resources on those programs in which:
 - CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven and promising counseling, academic, enrollment and retention support activities for economically disadvantaged students.

Priority Measures²²:

- Percent of students served by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers²³, or serving in CNCS-supported programs, who received counseling and guidance associated with skills needed for college preparation and success.
- Percent of students served by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who applied for and enrolled in a postsecondary institution.
- Percent of students served by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who continued to a second year of post-secondary education.

21. For purposes of performance measures, “CNCS-supported programs” include AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America and/or Senior Corps. The agency is in the process of specifying which priority measures apply to each program. We will provide this information in a Performance Management Addendum to be released later in FY 2011.

22. We are currently working with Department of Education to establish a baseline for the higher education priority measures.

23. Refers to AmeriCorps members, Learn and Serve America participants and Senior Corps volunteers.

VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

Demonstrate the potential for CNCS-supported national service interventions to 1) positively impact the quality of life of veterans and 2) improve military family strength.

Over the next five years, we will seek to expand national service interventions that improve the quality of life of veterans and military family strength²⁴. We will invest in emerging and established programs to address the needs of veterans and military families. We will focus efforts on learning where service-based programs have the greatest potential to improve military family strength and facilitate the reintegration of service members back into civilian life. Our focus includes programs that engage veterans and military family members in service (described in Goal #2), as well as those that provide service to this important population.

Engaging veterans and military family members in programs that serve other veteran and military family members has the potential to be an effective approach. Veterans and military family members prefer to receive information about services from friends, family and neighbors.²⁵ There is extensive research that indicates peers delivering social and mental health services to other peers results in better outcomes. Research suggests that peers are: 1) more able to empathize with other consumers, 2) more able to help them access services, 3) more able to appreciate other consumers' strengths, and 4) more able to be tolerant, patient and responsive to consumers' needs and desires.²⁶ Finally, the use of peers in a mental health setting has been associated with improvement in illness management, larger social support networks, enhanced self-esteem and social functioning, improvement in skill

deficits and use of available resources to meet needs, and lower service costs overall.²⁷

Based on our work, CNCS will refine a theory of change and a logic model²⁸ to inform our veterans and military families' strategy in 2013. In 2014-2015, we will focus our work in implementing this strategy.

A chart outlining the veterans and military families focus area strategy can be found in the Appendix. Below is an overview of our objectives, strategies and performance measures.

OBJECTIVE 1: Increase the number of veterans and military service members and their families served by CNCS-supported programs.

Strategies:

- CNCS will provide information and technical assistance that encourage grantees and sponsors to develop established program responses tailored to veterans and military service members and their families.
- CNCS will encourage the national service network to consider and apply for support to implement and test innovative approaches that will benefit veterans and military service members and their families, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers will engage in or develop proven or promising activities that provide, support and/or facilitate veterans and military service members and their families' access to:

24. Military families are defined as the spouse or unmarried dependent children (including stepchildren, adopted children and foster children) not more than 23 years of age when residing with the member of the U.S. Armed Forces. Family strength is defined as the ability of a family to successfully cope with the stresses associated with deployment. Veterans are former service members who qualify for benefits under programs of the Department of Veteran's Affairs which defines a veteran as person who served in the active military, naval or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

25. Department of Defense, Plans for the Department of Defense for the Support of Military Family Readiness.

26. Kathy Doboney. *The Power of Peers within a Mental Health Care System*. Presentation to Mental Health Staff at the Dallas VA Medical Center (April 18, 2008).

27. *Ibid.*

28. A theory of change is a strategy or blueprint for achieving large-scale, long-term goals. It identifies the preconditions, pathways and required outcomes and accomplishments for achieving the long-term goals. A logic model sets out how an intervention (such as a project, a program or a policy) is understood or intended to produce particular results. Some versions of a logic model present it as four components in a linear sequence: inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.

- Services/benefits to which they are entitled;
- Workforce development resources and services (e.g., financial, computer and job-search and workforce skills training or job placement programs);
- Services that improve educational attainment (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, peer-to-peer counseling);
- Safe, affordable housing; and
- Other quality-of-life improvements.

Priority Measure:

- Number of veterans and military service members and their family members who are served by CNCS-supported programs.

SPECIAL FOCUS: INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS

Intermediary organizations—those that provide sub-grants to and place service participants with other organizations—have always been a critical part of the national service network. We work with an extensive network of intermediaries including state service commissions, state education agencies, consortia of higher education institutions and other regional and national organizations. They provide many faith-based and community-based organizations from small towns and rural communities with access to infrastructure support and national service resources, thereby helping these organizations better meet needs in their communities. Some intermediaries, due to their responsiveness to local needs, are multi-focused and address a variety of community needs from education to economic opportunity to disaster services. Intermediaries build the capacity of nonprofits and local education agencies to expand and improve services, foster collaboration among organizations, recruit volunteers, and engage community members as partners in creating sustainable solutions to local problems. Many intermediaries also invest in developing the leadership and life skills of service participants.

As intermediaries, state service commissions play an important role in capacity building, infrastructure development, program development, and training and technical assistance for service and volunteering programs in their states. They enhance service and volunteering in their states through the creation of a state service plan. These plans are developed through an open and public process that provides for maximum participation and input from diverse stakeholders resulting in improved coordination and effectiveness of federal, state and local resources. These key functions improve community outcomes.

Intermediaries also play a critical role in the SIF. In order to identify those community-based organizations with the greatest potential for generating increased impact, help them strengthen their evidence base, and proactively support the growth of their work in order to significantly improve the lives of more people in more economically disadvantaged communities, the SIF relies on intermediaries with strong skills and track records of success to do the critical work of selecting, validating and growing high-impact nonprofit organizations.

Given their distinct roles, collaboration with intermediary organizations is necessary to achieve both our community impact and participant experience goals. CNCS is working with our intermediary grantees and sponsors to develop performance measures that adequately capture their impact in communities and on service participants.

SPECIAL FOCUS: RURAL COMMUNITIES

Investment in community solutions is central to our Strategic Plan. One of our top priorities is to ensure that national service reaches all kinds of communities, including those in rural areas. National service provides the opportunity for people from rural communities to get involved in community solutions while reaping the benefits of service. In particular, state service commissions are instrumental in ensuring that national service reaches communities in rural areas.

The needs of rural communities align with the Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families priorities discussed in this Plan. They are also addressed through all of CNCS' programs.

In recent years, AmeriCorps has provided increasing grants to small and rural states such as Kansas, Mississippi, Iowa and Utah, all of which received an average increase of 51 percent in their state formula grant allocations in the AmeriCorps State and National program in FY 2010. Also, 67 percent of grantees that self-identified as having a rural programming focus received funding.²⁹

United Way of Northwest Georgia supports nine VISTA members who participate in activities related to early childhood education, parent enrichment, community-based educational opportunities, and adult assisted learning. VISTA members assist with helping maintain critical services that promote literacy, improve health and human services, and increase housing and supportive housing initiatives in rural counties in Northwest Georgia, specifically Whitfield, Murray, Gilmer, Pickens and Fannin Counties.

The Nevada Rural Counties RSVP annually engages over 900 volunteers in rural Nevada to provide more than 160,000 hours of volunteer service to over 160 public and nonprofit community agencies and to Nevada's elderly population. The activities of RSVP volunteers are far-ranging, from managing food distribution efforts to providing transportation services for seniors to offering respite for 24/7 care providers.

Many of these programs provide opportunities for residents in rural communities to become national service participants and therefore benefit from the economic opportunity and educational benefits of service while giving back to their communities.

²⁹. Program data extracted and analyzed from eGrants, current as of February 1, 2011.

GOAL 2

Strengthen national service so that participants engaged in CNCS-supported programs consistently find satisfaction, meaning and opportunity

We will strengthen and enhance the national service experience so that we can continue to offer a unique combination of professional, educational and life benefits to service participants. We will continue to expand our reach to include more Americans of diverse backgrounds so that they can take full advantage of the distinct benefits of service and develop a sustained commitment to civic engagement and national service. Moreover, by engaging diverse citizens who possess a wide range of cultural competencies, we will achieve greater impact on community challenges.

In order to accomplish this goal, we have established the following objectives:

- Make national service opportunities accessible and attractive to Americans of all backgrounds;
- Help CNCS-supported participants find meaning in their service experience and remain highly engaged in their communities;
- Ensure that CNCS-supported participants are satisfied with the quality of their service experience;
- Ensure that CNCS-supported participants find professional, educational or civic growth opportunities in their service experience; and
- Help CNCS-supported veterans and participants 55 years of age and older experience the health benefits associated with service.

I. RATIONALE

Our rationale for continuing to engage a diverse base of citizens in service and for strengthening and enhancing the participant experience is based on the following factors:

Engaging a diversity of participants brings new perspectives and approaches, making our work better and strengthening the solutions accomplished by our partners. For example, health is a personal issue, and people view health care in varying ways. Hence, service participants need to be knowledgeable, culturally competent and persuasive in order to be effective in connecting people with health services. The specialized training, sustained commitment and immersion of CNCS-supported participants in local communities enable them to take an active leadership role in the communities in which they serve and develop a level of trust so they can work effectively with residents.

Outcomes for both the service participant and the communities in which they serve are improved when the participant has a positive service experience filled with opportunities for professional, educational and personal growth. National service offers the participant a unique combination of professional, educational and life benefits. CNCS-supported participants may receive an education award to pay education costs at qualified institutions of higher education, for educational training or to repay qualified student loans. Since 1994, over \$2 billion have been earned by over 600,000 AmeriCorps members.³⁰ In fact, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of participants surveyed report that the education award was an incentive for them to join AmeriCorps.³¹

Another benefit is the wide range of skills that CNCS-supported participants develop during their experience, ranging from hard skills such as construction and weatherizing, disaster response planning and operations, to softer skills such as counseling, leadership, teamwork,

30. 2010 Annual Financial Report, http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/11_1115_final_fy_10_afr.pdf.

31. AmeriCorps: Changing Lives, Changing America, Washington, D.C. (2007). http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0515_ac_memberimpact.pdf.

appropriate workplace behaviors and cultural competency. High percentages of AmeriCorps members report that they earned valuable skills that they used in later employment.³²

Promising research suggests that connecting with and serving one's community may be associated with an individual's improved physical health and emotional well-being. The research, which is primarily the result of observational studies, suggests that volunteering is correlated to physical and emotional health. For example, those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer.³³ Other research suggests that national service participants and volunteers themselves can gain greater self-confidence, enhanced ability to cope with their own illnesses and issues, greater self-esteem, and improved quality of life.³⁴ Future research will be needed to determine if the health benefits associated with being a volunteer can be attributed to volunteer activity.

Participants who have a meaningful service experience remain engaged in their communities and in national service. In addition to these more tangible benefits, informal interviews and testimonials from CNCS-supported participants indicate that participants gain an increased sense of purpose which can be directed into a lifelong commitment to civic engagement and service. CNCS-supported participants can experience a unique sense of empowerment that stems from the realization that they possess the ability to make a difference in communities, that they are part of an effort to solve issues of significance, and that with open minds and effort, they can be accepted by and connected to communities with which they have not interacted before.

We believe that the benefits of service and its transformative potential exist within all of our service programs including Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America. The powerful combination of benefits is a compelling reason for expanding the opportunity to serve to Americans of all backgrounds. Moreover, we believe that the greater the diversity of national service participants who bring new perspectives and new approaches to our grantees' and sponsors' work, the better national service is able to address community challenges. Finally, working in collaboration with the national service network, CNCS will continue on our path to reach the target of 50 percent full-time AmeriCorps positions by 2012.³⁵

II. STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

In order to achieve the goal of expanding the opportunity to serve and strengthening the CNCS participant experience, CNCS will employ two overarching strategies:

a) An outreach strategy that involves:

- Increasing applications from rural and underserved communities for national service programs;
- Engaging the national service network in knowledge sharing about best practices for ensuring that participants find satisfaction, meaning and opportunity;
- Forming partnerships with organizations in the national service network that are working in alignment with our goals; and
- Connecting national service participants engaged in programs to each other to enhance the participant experience.

32. Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development, *Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni*, Washington, D.C. (2008).

33. Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development. *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*, Washington, D.C. (2007).

34. Kathy Dohoney. *The Power of Peers within a Mental Health Care System*. Presentation to Mental Health Staff at the Dallas VA Medical Center (April 18, 2008).

35. *Subject to the availability of appropriations and quality service opportunities.*

b) A targeted funding strategy that involves:

- Identifying, sharing and supporting the program models that best accomplish our goals in strengthening the participant experience or expanding the opportunity to serve.

OBJECTIVE 1: Make CNCS-supported national service opportunities accessible and attractive to Americans of all backgrounds.

Strategies:

- Prioritize funding to organizations that seek to recruit and engage traditionally underrepresented populations in service. We will prioritize funding through our grant competition processes to ensure that grantees and sponsors are provided incentives to engage underrepresented populations that may require innovative recruitment, training and retention strategies.
- Strengthen outreach and technical assistance efforts to ensure an expanded pool of grant applicants proposing specific programs and strategies that engage underrepresented populations in service to their communities.
- Conduct outreach to encourage existing CNCS-supported programs to collaborate with organizations with depth of experience in serving veterans, military service members and their families and/or traditionally underrepresented populations.
- Explore partnerships with other federal agencies that work directly with veterans, military families and Veterans Serving Organizations (VSOs).

Priority Measures:

- Percent of CNCS-supported participants who are members of underrepresented populations.

- Number of veterans and military family members engaged in providing services through CNCS-supported programs.

OBJECTIVE 2: CNCS-supported participants find meaning in their service experience and remain engaged in their communities.

OBJECTIVE 3: CNCS-supported participants have a high quality service experience.

OBJECTIVE 4: CNCS-supported participants find professional, educational or civic growth opportunities in their service experience.

Strategies (for Objectives 2-4):

- Collect best practices and promising program models that provide the “best in class” in terms of understanding and distinguishing “meaningful” and “satisfactory” participant experiences.
- Disseminate that knowledge to the national service network so that it can continue to improve the service experience it provides to CNCS-supported participants.
- Continue to study CNCS-supported participant satisfaction and develop a solid baseline measure for it.

Priority Measures:

- Percent of CNCS-supported participants who are aware of community needs and community driven solutions.³⁶
- Percent of CNCS-supported participants who report that they are connected to the national service community.
- Percent of CNCS-supported participants who report that they are satisfied with their service experience.

36. Data collection instruments will provide clear definitions of community, community needs, community driven solutions and other relevant terms.

- Percent of CNCS-supported participants who report gaining skills they can apply to future educational or professional endeavors.

OBJECTIVE 5: CNCS-supported participants age 55 and older and veterans experience health benefits associated with service.

Strategy:

- CNCS will measure the impact of service on veterans as well as participants age 55 and older, including Senior Corps and encore volunteers. The national service laws call for the inclusion of older adults in service. Congress set a goal that 10 percent of AmeriCorps competitive funding should support encore service programs. CNCS seeks to meet that 10 percent target and encourages programs that engage a significant number of participants age 55 or older to apply.³⁷ As we continue to engage veterans and older adults in service, we will measure the psychosocial health impacts that they experience.

Priority Measure:

- Percent of CNCS-supported participants 55 and older, or veterans, who report psychosocial health benefits associated with service.

37. Amended Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity AmeriCorps State and National Grants FY 2011.

GOAL 3

Maximize the value we add to grantees, partners and participants

We will strengthen the collective capacity of CNCS and the national service network to measure performance and conduct rigorous evaluations of program impacts.

In order to maximize the value we add to grantees, partners and participants, we will focus on three interrelated objectives:

- Build on the knowledge base of best practices and support efforts to measure results;
- Improve organizational capacity to conduct rigorous evaluation of programs to measure outcomes and/or impact; and
- Leverage community assets through public-private partnerships.

I. RATIONALE

CNCS will continually conduct research and evaluation projects to understand how national service can help solve pressing problems. This knowledge base of best practices will provide our grantees and sponsors with the necessary tools to better achieve their desired results and measure their performance. To accomplish this we need to work closely with national service network organizations that have the knowledge and skills to align their work with our goals, strategies and performance measures. The value to the network will be the relevance and accessibility of this knowledge base, and the extent to which organizations are able to improve their work by applying it.

II. STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: Build on the knowledge base of best practices and support efforts to measure results.

Strategies:

- Conduct research and evaluation activities to build knowledge in three specific areas:
 - How national service delivers effective solutions to community problems;
 - How engagement in national service programs and projects delivers benefits to participants; and
 - How to improve CNCS' effectiveness.
- Work with the national service network to develop targeted materials that will facilitate application of learning and thought leadership, specifically in the following content areas:
 - Best practices in using service in the six focus areas;
 - Performance management and measurement practices aligned with CNCS performance measures; and
 - Best practices in maximizing participant impact.
- Disseminate thought leadership and capacity building tools, publications and reports to those who have the potential to integrate service into community solutions and achieve results in the six focus areas (i.e., state service commissions, nonprofit leaders, policy makers, federal agencies and other actors). Depending on the content area and the targeted audience, the kinds of methods we might use include:
 - Website and media outlets (e.g., online courses, blogs and facilitated learning communities);
 - The National Conference on Volunteering and Service;
 - Meetings or convenings; and
 - Articles and reports.

Priority Measure:

- Percent of grantees and sponsors that opt into performance measures who participated in a specific capacity building activity.

OBJECTIVE 2: Improve organizational capacity to conduct rigorous evaluations of our programs to measure outcomes and/or impact.

While this objective and measures are specific to the SIF, in the future we plan to use the experience and knowledge gained through this work to disseminate best practices and support across all our programs to enhance evaluation capacity.

Strategies:

For the SIF:

- Require evaluation as a prerequisite to funding allocations;
- Conduct technical reviews of evaluations to inform investment decisions;
- Review grantee evaluation strategies;
- Provide training and technical assistance in support of grantee program and evaluation strategies; and
- Develop, implement and maintain active learning communities.

CNCS has established a learning community to maximize the individual and collective impact of the entities involved with the SIF. The Social Innovation Fund Knowledge Network provides opportunities to share protocols, ideas and promising practices, as well as a forum to discuss strategies, ask questions and solicit support. It is a prototype for establishing future learning communities among organizations working in each of our strategic focus areas.

Priority Measure:

- Percent of organizations³⁸ that implement evaluations that demonstrate stronger evidence of program effectiveness than in the year prior to receiving CNCS funding.

OBJECTIVE 3: Leverage community assets through public-private partnerships.

National service has always been a vehicle for public-private partnership through match requirements and strategies requiring local collaboration to receive our resources. The structure of the SIF reinforces CNCS' role as a catalyst for leveraging federal investments with private funding.

Strategies:

- Develop a plan for measuring the impact of capacity building activities that leverage private investment in community solutions. These capacity building activities may be provided by VISTA, state service commissions, intermediary grantees and others;
- Develop collaborations with national service network organizations for disseminating CNCS knowledge, expanding opportunities to serve and building capacity to use service at the local level; and
- Develop collaborations with the philanthropic community. We hope to supplement our investments in local communities by actively seeking opportunities for joint investment.

Priority Measure:

- To be determined—Outcomes of capacity building efforts initiated by CNCS activities on key indicators of nonprofit organization capacity.

38. In 2011 and 2012, this priority measure will only apply to the Social Innovation Fund. We are in the process of determining the applicability to other CNCS programs and the data collection method.

GOAL 4

Fortify management operations and sustain a capable, responsive and accountable organization

I. RATIONALE

The primary resources for our operations are human capital, grants funding and information technology (IT). Building upon our current infrastructure, we will strengthen and enhance our information technology systems, workforce and financial and grants management efforts so that CNCS is optimally positioned to meet the strategic goals and objectives detailed in Goals 1 through 3 of this Plan.

II. STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: Strengthen IT systems to enhance efficiencies, enable program effectiveness and improve accountability.

Strategies:

- Enhance data warehouse.³⁹

With our focus on results, we need to improve collection and analysis of grantees' and sponsors' performance measures. We will rely on an enhanced data warehouse that will provide the infrastructure needed to collect, analyze and report detailed performance measures. This work will continue to support the Open Government initiative to make data more readily available to the public.

- Modify our public facing systems and user interface.

The Strategic Plan public forums we conducted with the national service network identified key interfaces we need to modify (e.g., enhanced flexibility and ease of use in grant application and member management systems).

- Continue to improve the computing environment by shifting to modern software and cloud computing.

A recent government-wide plan requires federal agencies to move toward cloud computing solutions. Embracing cloud computing will lower IT costs, improve system access and stability, and enable IT staff to focus on supporting the needs of the programs.

- Enhance IT security.

As systems are enhanced and/or redesigned, we will prioritize security. There will be a concerted effort to reduce or eliminate privacy data and improve access controls while staying compliant with laws and regulations.

Priority Measure:

- Complete modernization of IT infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE 2: Develop and retain a talented, diverse and adaptive workforce that continues to promote organizational excellence and advance national service.

Strategy:

- Develop and implement a strategic human capital plan to achieve strategic work alignment.
 - CNCS will develop a human capital strategic plan reflecting workforce assessment, identification of new competencies and a baseline for recruitment and retention (including technical competency and leadership development). In order to foster innovation and responsiveness, we must also create an organizational culture that promotes adaptability and continuous learning through workforce engagement across program areas, cross-training and use of matrix management.
 - We will plan, recruit and place positions in the workforce in order to meet CNCS' current and projected work requirements. CNCS is committed to the strategic management of federal personnel. Additional experience in our six focus areas will be

39. A data warehouse is a central repository for all or significant elements of data that an organization's various information systems collect.

needed to advance our work, along with a working knowledge of program evaluation and results accountability.

- We will continually assess the key requirements of our work. An assessment will be used to align the competencies of the workforce with the work requirements. Accordingly, on-going assessment and monitoring of key human capital talent dimensions will be planned to ensure our workforce is properly supporting CNCS' goals.

Priority Measure:

- Implement strategic human capital plan.

OBJECTIVE 3: Ensure that financial and grants management systems and policies support CNCS' business infrastructure so that the objectives and goals of this Strategic Plan can be met.

Strategies:

- Maintain an optimal, secure, financial system environment.

CNCS will establish and maintain an environment for financial transaction integrity and internal controls because it is fundamental to our core grantmaking function and essential to providing fiscal accountability to the public. CNCS will continue efforts to achieve a grant payment processing environment that is convenient, efficient, automated, cost-effective, and secure, while ensuring transactions are processed at the highest level of security as demonstrated by preparing and publishing independently audited financial statements for the public.

- Promote adherence to internal controls.

We will implement and test controls over financial reporting required by law and public policy. CNCS will expand the use of internal control associates to promote a strong control environment, identify areas for improved operations and test agency compliance. These activities will have a specific focus on CNCS' grant processes and program operations, which collectively comprise a majority of CNCS' funding.

- Award grants and contracts and publish results within timelines prescribed by policy.

We will carry out our grant award activity in a timely and transparent manner, promote accountability by providing the public with information and improve program effectiveness by promoting a focus on results, service quality and customer satisfaction. CNCS will continue efforts to streamline grant award processes.

Priority Measures:

- Prepare and publish audited financial statements covering CNCS operations within 45 days of fiscal year end.
- Ensure that no internal control or compliance issues are identified in annual financial statements.
- Award and close grants and contracts within prescribed timeframes.
- Achieve acquisition cost savings and efficiencies.



Measuring Performance and Evaluation

The cross-cutting goals and objectives in CNCS' Strategic Plan align our programs and focus our work to achieve a specific set of results. Each goal describes the outcome that we aim to achieve with a defined set of objectives. For each objective, we have identified related strategies that define how we intend to accomplish those results. Finally, these strategies have specific performance measures that define how we will know that we are successful in achieving our goals.

Our ability to achieve the goals and objectives described in this Strategic Plan depends on the level and allocation of budgetary and human resources. We are committed to allocating resources efficiently by measuring performance, evaluating programs and monitoring the work of our grantees and sponsors.

We are also committed to strengthening our ability to report on performance results in achieving strategic goals and delivering value to the American public. Historically, we have held ourselves accountable for increasing the overall rates of volunteering in America and the types of individuals engaged in service. From FY 2006-2010, we increased the number of CNCS-sponsored volunteers by 50 percent—from 3.7 million to 5.6 million. We generated a 400 percent increase in the number of college students serving their communities. In some cases, we also tracked the population served. For example, during this period our programs mentored more than 110,000 children and youth of incarcerated parents, an increase of more than 300 percent.⁴⁰ Moving forward we will be more rigorous in measuring the success of national service in meeting critical community needs, as reflected in our performance measures.

The Strategic Plan focuses on 42 agency-level measures that reflect our top priorities. For some measures, there is a level of performance or 'target' assigned with the expectation that it will be met. In FY 2011 and FY 2012 we will establish the baselines for the measures where no targets have yet been established. Once the baselines are established, we will set annual performance targets to track and improve our progress. We will assess our performance against these targets annually. We will build operational and programmatic improvements into the agency to reinforce a culture of continuous improvement and operational excellence based on our learnings. Because much of our success is based on our grantees' and sponsors' ability to report their results, we will also encourage sharing across grantees and sponsors to support evidence-based decision making and program improvements. Because FY 2011 is the first year of the Plan, the majority of CNCS programs will begin tracking performance measures in FY 2012.

BUILDING AN EVIDENCE BASE

We continue to build an evidence base that seeks to bolster our ability to make informed decisions about our strategies and effective use of resources.

Projects include a balanced mix of rigorous, long-term evaluations that identify program and participant impacts and shorter-term policy and management studies that provide more timely information about administrative and policy matters that are important to the agency.

40. 2010 Annual Financial Report, http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/11_1115_final_fy_10_afr.pdf.

THE EVIDENCE CONTINUUM

The SIF, which requires funded organizations to conduct evaluations of program impact, has established a continuum of evidence to categorize a program's effectiveness. Over the next five years, CNCS will use this continuum as a starting point to inform an evidence continuum for service-based solutions.

STRONG IMPACT

Strong impact means an impact with a substantial likelihood of yielding a major change in life outcomes for individuals or improvements in community standards of living. This definition will vary with context. For example, a mentoring program that cut youth crime by two percent over a given period would not have a strong impact, but a program that cut such crime by 20 percent could.

STRONG EVIDENCE (PROVEN PROGRAM OR PRACTICE)

Strong evidence means evidence from previous studies whose designs can support causal conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity), and studies that in total include enough of the range of participants and settings to support scaling up to the state, regional or national level (i.e., studies with high external validity). An example of strong evidence is more than one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study that supports the effectiveness of the practice, strategy or program.

MODERATE EVIDENCE (PROVEN PROGRAM OR PRACTICE)

Moderate evidence means evidence from previous studies whose designs can support causal conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity) but have limited generalizability (i.e., moderate external validity), or studies with high external validity but moderate internal validity. An example of moderate evidence is at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental study supporting the effectiveness of the practice strategy, or program, with small sample sizes or other conditions of implementation or analysis that limit generalizability.

PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE (PROMISING PROGRAM OR PRACTICE)

Preliminary evidence means evidence that is based on a reasonable hypothesis supported by research findings. Thus, research that has yielded promising results for either the program, or a similar program, will constitute preliminary evidence and will meet CNCS' criteria. An example of preliminary evidence is outcome studies that track program participants through a service 'pipeline' and measure participants' responses at the end of the program.



Conclusion

Americans can effectively respond to challenges by getting involved in their local communities through service. To realize this potential and fulfill our mission, we will work together with the national service network to invest in local solutions, engage Americans in service, support evidence based programs and leverage public-private partnerships. In executing this Strategic Plan, CNCS will help build enduring capacity to solve community problems at the local level. More economically disadvantaged young children will be ready for school, work and life; veterans and military families will be appreciated, supported and continue to serve their communities; economically disadvantaged people will have improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people will be improved. Citizens engaged, motivated, supported and linked together through a national service network will be the solution.



Appendix

Since its inception, CNCS has been authorized to focus on community needs throughout the nation in education, the environment, human needs and public safety. The Serve America Act increases the agency's focus specifically on Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. It follows that the six strategic focus areas for Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan—to increase the impact of national service activities on community needs—will guide how CNCS' programs and initiatives benefit communities.

To ensure that CNCS programs support interventions that deliver results aligned with the objectives and strategies developed for each focus area, we have developed **Strategy Charts** for Goal 1 which are included in this document.

Each chart states the **overall goal** of the focus area at the top and lists the key objectives CNCS intends to achieve in that area over the next five years. For each **key objective**, the charts show the **strategies** CNCS will implement to achieve it through investments in programs that provide direct services to recipients and in collaboration with other national service network organizations.

The third column in the charts indicates the **performance measures** by which CNCS will measure and report our progress in meeting the strategic objectives for each focus area. **Priority measures** are agency-level performance measures intended to measure the impact of CNCS' collective activities in implementing the Strategic Plan. For the Goal 1 focus areas, priority measures represent the most important, end-state outcomes in that they measure actual changes in behavior or condition by aggregating a

series of supporting measures. Where it may not be feasible for CNCS grantees and sponsors to measure outcomes, the priority measures represent quantifiable results, or outputs, of key activities. Supporting measures are performance measures that CNCS grantees and sponsors (Goals 1 and 2) or CNCS management (Goals 3 and 4) collect and report on. These may be a combination of outputs, outcomes and process measures. The supporting measures are under development in 2011 and are therefore not included in the Strategy Charts.

The last column in the charts indicates when **baselines** for each priority measure will be established. For AmeriCorps, pilot measures from the 2010 Notice of Funding Availability, baselines will be established in the winter of 2011 when grantees submit their annual progress reports. For some new measures, baselines will be developed in 2012 after the 2011 grant competitions.

DISASTER SERVICES: Strategy Chart

Overall Goal: Build the capacity of national service network organizations to help their states and localities prepare, respond, recover and mitigate disasters and increase community resiliency.

Objectives	Strategies	Priority Measures	Baseline Availability
1. Increase the preparedness of states and communities through engagement and support of CNCS and its affiliates.	<p>1.1. Engage in planning with partners at the federal, state and local levels, and with NGOs, to identify the role that CNCS and its affiliates will fulfill.</p> <p>1.2. Build the knowledge base of CNCS and its grantees and sponsors about roles in the disaster readiness management cycle.</p> <p>1.3. Provide effective communication and outreach to partners, grantees, sponsors and states regarding available disaster services preparedness support.</p>	1.1. Pre-disaster partnerships developed with five national organizations active in disasters. These partnerships will serve as a venue to build public trust and confidence in CNCS as well as to integrate CNCS assets and resources in areas identified as underserved and vulnerable.	2012
2. Increase the assistance provided to help states and communities increase their readiness to respond.	<p>2.1. Provide support in advance of disasters, which will assist a community in responding, organizing, galvanizing and coordinating volunteer resources.</p> <p>2.2. Provide knowledge and training to increase the preparedness of individuals.</p>	2.1. Establish pre-disaster, early partnerships, planning and initiatives with federal agencies which support disaster readiness programs as an entry to maximize CNCS assets and resources in underserved and vulnerable communities.	TBD
3. Increase the assistance provided to help states and communities recover from disasters.	3.1. Support short and long term recovery activities in stricken areas.	3.1. Increased quality of training/outreach/direct service which provides long-term economic/environmental and/or social services support to individuals and families identified as unmet needs populations not supported through federal disaster assistance programs.	TBD
4. Increase the assistance provided to help states and communities mitigate disasters.	4.1. Target repetitive disaster prone and/or vulnerable communities, states and regions.	4.1. Number of organizations, grantees, sponsors and state service commissions partnering with CNCS to develop mitigate service projects and/or outreach activities.	TBD

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY: Strategy Chart

Overall Goal: Provide, support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people.

Objectives	Strategies	Priority Measures	Baseline Availability
1. Economically disadvantaged* people have improved access to services and benefits aimed at contributing to their enhanced financial literacy.	1.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities that provide, support and/or facilitate access to resources and services that improve financial literacy, stability and security. Such activities include: dissemination of financial education resources; tax preparation; provision of consumer counseling or financial fitness coaching; referrals to government programs like child support enforcement or unemployment insurance; connection to community resources, services or benefits; etc.	1.1. Percent of economically disadvantaged people receiving financial services-related assistance from CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who show improvement in their financial literacy.	2011
2. Economically disadvantaged people transition into or are able to remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing.	2.1. Emphasize programs involving CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers serving: persons with HUD-defined “worst case” housing needs; persons who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; disabled persons; veterans and military families; seniors needing assistance to live independently; or other especially vulnerable populations. 2.2. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities that provide, support and/or facilitate access to or utilization of housing resources—including those involving wrap-around supportive services. Such activities include construction or repair of housing, provision of counseling or case management services, assistance with activities of daily living, etc.	2.1. Percent of economically disadvantaged people receiving housing-related assistance from CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who show improvement in their housing situation.	2011
3. Economically disadvantaged people have improved employability leading to increased success in becoming employed.	3.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities that provide, support and/or facilitate access to workforce development resources and services—including for veterans and military families—intended to lead to improved employability and, ultimately, to employment. Such activities include assisting in job training and job placement programs, etc. 3.2. Emphasize (prioritize) programs in which CNCS-supported service enhances the employment prospects for economically disadvantaged CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers (Goal 2).	3.1. Percent of economically disadvantaged people receiving employment-related assistance from CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who become employed.	2011

* Must be receiving or meet the income eligibility requirements to receive: TANF, food stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, SCHIP, Section 8 housing assistance.

EDUCATION : Strategy Chart

Overall Goal: Provide, support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged people, especially children. CNCS will, throughout its activities, focus on the use of evidence-based and promising practices and will collaborate with other agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Labor and the White House Office of Faith-based Initiatives. Priority in funding new grants will be given to applicants that provide evidence on the effectiveness of their programs.

Objectives	Strategies	Priority Measures	Baseline Availability
1. Improve school readiness for economically disadvantaged young children.	<p>1.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers develop or engage in proven or promising activities that include teaching, tutoring and/or the provision of education-related supportive services for children or their families that improve school readiness.</p> <p>1.2. CNCS will work with grantees and sponsors to understand where service can make the greatest impact among the supporting measures. Once more data is collected and analyzed, CNCS will promote a more specific priority measure.</p>	<p>1.1. Percent of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of social and emotional development.</p> <p>1.2. Percent of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of literacy skills.</p> <p>1.3. Percent of children demonstrating gains in school readiness in terms of numeracy (math) skills.</p>	2011
2. Improve educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle and high schools.	<p>2.1 CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities intended to improve learning and grade-level success in low-achieving schools, such as: teaching, tutoring and/or mentoring of students; providing supportive services to assist staff; providing extended learning programs in cooperation with school systems (such as after school and summer learning); or providing other types of school improvement support to school systems.</p> <p>2.2. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in high quality service-learning projects in low-achieving schools.</p> <p>2.3. CNCS provides assistance to higher education institutions and alternative certification programs to increase the number of teachers or teaching aids working in low-achieving schools or otherwise provide assistance to community-based learning centers in high poverty communities.</p> <p>2.4. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers provide proven or promising capacity-building services for state and local education agencies or community-based learning centers.</p>	<p>2.1. Percent of students* served by or serving in CNCS-supported programs**, who demonstrate improved academic performance (including the percent meeting state proficiency levels in reading and math or whose scores on state standardized tests improved).</p> <p>2.2. Percent of students* served by CNCS-supported programs, or engaged in CNCS-supported service-learning, who demonstrate improved academic engagement.</p>	2011
3. Improve the preparation for and prospects of success in post-secondary education institutions for economically disadvantaged students.	<p>3.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven and promising counseling, academic, enrollment and retention support activities for economically disadvantaged students.</p>	<p>3.1. Percent of students* served by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers, or serving in CNCS-supported programs, who received counseling and guidance associated with skills needed for college preparation and success.</p> <p>3.2. Percent of students* served by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who applied for and enrolled in a post-secondary institution.</p> <p>3.3. Percent of students* served by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers who continued to a second year of post-secondary education.</p>	2012

* Depending on the type of intervention delivered (teaching, tutoring, service-learning), CNCS anticipates different types of outcomes.

** For purposes of performance measures, "CNCS-supported programs" include AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America and/or Senior Corps. The agency is in the process of specifying which priority measures apply to each program.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: Strategy Chart

Overall Goal: Provide direct services that contribute to increased energy and water efficiency, renewable energy use, or improving at-risk ecosystems, and support increased citizen behavioral change leading to increased efficiency, renewable energy use, and ecosystem improvements particularly for economically disadvantaged households and economically disadvantaged communities.

Objectives	Strategies	Priority Measures	Baseline Availability
1. Decrease energy and water consumption.	1.1. CNCS funds and supports projects engaged in physical construction activities on new beyond-code* housing units or community facilities, or improvements of existing housing units or community facilities, related to energy and water performance in economically disadvantaged households and for public facilities in economically disadvantaged communities.	1.1. Number of energy-efficient housing units constructed or retrofitted by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.	2011
2. Improve at-risk ecosystems.	2.1. CNCS funds and supports projects engaged in direct sustained recycling and waste treatment activities, improving at-risk public lands, or improving at-risk public waterways.** This work may coincide with other national, state or local ecosystem improvement initiatives, like the Environmental Protection Agency's CARE or the U.S. Department of the Interior's America's Great Outdoors Initiative.	2.1. Number of total acres improved by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.	2011
3. Increase behavioral changes that lead directly to Objectives 1 and 2.	3.1. CNCS funds and supports projects engaged in proven or promising activities that create awareness among economically disadvantaged households and economically disadvantaged communities of personal actions to benefit energy and water conservation and efficiency, solid waste recycling, and the environmental conditions of public lands and waterways leading to subsequent personal and community action. This includes engaging households in appropriate public services as well as potential private actions.	3.1. Number of individuals reached by outreach campaigns, events, workshops or similar awareness strategies launched by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.	2012
4. Increase green training opportunities that may lead to Objectives 1 and 2.	4.1. CNCS funds and supports programs that provide formal and informal green job training for economically disadvantaged individuals (members and non-members) and economically disadvantaged communities.***	4.1. Percent of economically disadvantaged or unemployed individuals completing formal green job training programs provided or coordinated by CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.	2012

* Beyond-code refers to energy-efficient reductions beyond what is required based on building code.

** "Improvement" in at-risk public lands, waterways or trails must be beyond general cleanup. Sample activities include removal of invasive species, natural storm water system restoration, fire fuel reduction and indigenous flora replanting.

*** "Formal" green job training is defined as a longer-term training program leading to a widely-accepted industry or academic credential. Most green job training programs are still not formal as the U.S. Department of Energy began defining credential standards recently and is expected to complete them in 2012. Therefore, we will track both formal and informal programs until more formal programs are available.

HEALTHY FUTURES : Strategy Chart

Overall Goal: Provide direct services that enable seniors to remain in their own homes with the same or improved quality of life for as long as possible; increase physical activity and improve nutrition in youth with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity; and improve access to primary and preventive health care.

Objectives	Strategies	Priority Measures	Baseline Availability
1. Increase seniors' ability to remain in their own homes with the same or improved quality of life for as long as possible.	1.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities to provide services such as transportation services, nutrition services and social contact that promote the ability of older Americans to remain in their own homes (age in place).	1.1. Percent of homebound or older adults and individuals with disabilities receiving CNCS-supported services (or their families or caseworkers) who report that: the services have helped them to continue living at home and/or they have benefited from the social contact with volunteers.	TBD
2. Increase physical activity and improve nutrition in youth with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity.	<p>2.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities to provide school-based or after-school physical activity programs to increase awareness of the importance of physical activity and good nutrition and promote improved behaviors related to physical activity and nutrition with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity.</p> <p>2.2. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities to provide school-based or after-school nutrition education programs, including school or community gardens, to increase awareness of the importance of good nutrition and promote improved behaviors related to nutrition with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity.</p> <p>2.3. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities that provide, support and/or facilitate reliable access to food resources or services for children and families. Such activities include distributing or delivering food, providing food education counseling, referrals to government programs like SNAP and WIC, etc.</p>	<p>2.1. Number of children and youth who participated in in-school or after-school physical education activities provided through CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.</p> <p>2.2. Number of children and youth who received nutrition education including school or community gardens activities provided with the assistance of CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.</p> <p>2.3. Number of individuals who gain access to food resources provided with the assistance of CNCS-supported members, participants or volunteers.</p>	<p>2011</p> <p>2011</p> <p>2012</p>
3. Improve access to primary and preventive health care for communities served by CNCS-supported programs (access to health care).	<p>3.1. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers engage in proven or promising activities to provide uninsured, economically disadvantaged and medically underserved individuals with connections to preventive and primary health care services and programs.</p> <p>3.2. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers perform outreach, engagement and education services to provide uninsured and economically disadvantaged individuals with information on health insurance, health care access and health benefits.</p> <p>3.3. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers perform outreach, engagement and support to increase enrollment of uninsured and economically disadvantaged individuals in health insurance and health benefits programs.</p>	3.1. Number of uninsured and economically disadvantaged individuals connected to and utilizing preventive and primary health care services and programs, through support from CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers.	2011

VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES: Strategy Chart

Overall Goal: Over the next five years, CNCS will demonstrate the potential for CNCS-supported, national service interventions to 1) positively impact the quality of life of veterans and 2) improve military family strength.

Objectives	Strategies	Priority Measures	Baseline Availability
1. Increase the number of veterans and military service members and their families served by CNCS-supported programs.	<p>1.1. CNCS will provide information and technical assistance that encourages grantees and sponsors to develop established program responses tailored to veterans and military service members and their families.</p> <p>1.2. CNCS will encourage the national service network to consider and apply for support to implement and test innovative approaches that will benefit veterans and military service members and their families, particularly in rural and underserved areas.</p> <p>1.3. CNCS-supported members, participants and volunteers will engage in or develop proven or promising activities that provide, support and/or facilitate veterans and military service members and their families' access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services/benefits to which they are entitled; • Workforce development resources and services (e.g., financial, computer, job-search and workforce skills training or job placement programs); • Services (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, peer-to-peer counseling) that improve educational attainment; • Safe, affordable housing; and • Other quality-of-life improvements. 	1.1. Number of veterans and military service members and their families who are served by CNCS-supported programs.*, **, ***	2012
2. Increase the number of veterans and military family members engaged in service provision through CNCS-supported programs.	<p>2.1. Conduct outreach to encourage existing programs to engage veterans and military family members and organizations with depth of experience serving veterans and/or traditionally underrepresented populations.</p> <p>2.2. Explore partnerships with other federal agencies that work directly with veterans, military family members and Veteran Serving Organizations (VSOs).</p>	2.1. Number of veterans and military family members engaged in providing services through CNCS-supported programs.	2011

* This objective measures the accomplishments/outcomes directly associated with CNCS-supported grantees/sponsors' activities (related to strategy 1.3), not the efforts undertaken by CNCS and the outputs from strategies 1.1 and 1.2.

** CNCS will ask grantees and sponsors to report the number/percentage of veterans separately from that of military families, and to report each of these by breaking down into the specific kinds of service focus the project offered (e.g., employment, educational, housing).

*** For some projects, grantees and sponsors may document client outcomes routinely using pre- and post-tests or by accessing related official records (e.g., school report cards to show improvement in attendance, grades or graduation to next level; certificates; and licensure); for other projects, it may be necessary for grantees and sponsors to collect brief post-service surveys that collect outcomes self-reported by clients.