

Editorials and Op-Eds

An important way to support passage of The Serve America Act is by encouraging your paper to publish an editorial in support of the legislation, by submitting a letter to the editor or an op-ed to the local newspaper. Included in these materials is a set of talking points that be used as guidance in making the pitch for an editorial and writing an op-ed or letter to the editor.

Submitting Your Letter to the Editor or Op-Ed

- Submission guidelines for letters to the editor can usually be found on the letters to the editor page or by looking on the paper's Web site. Follow whatever guidelines the paper has, including length, the type of contact information you should provide and how the letter to the editor should be submitted.
- When submitting an op-ed, you will first need to find out the name of the editorial page editor or op-ed page editor, either by checking the paper's Web site or calling and asking for his or her name. Then contact that person to introduce yourself and your issue. (You do not need to contact the editorial page editor if you are submitting a letter to the editor).
- Practice before calling the editorial page editor and know exactly what you will say. Tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an op-ed about service, and ask about any specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines). Use only a few minutes to introduce yourself and explain the issue – editors are quite busy and their time should be respected.
- Find out the editor's preferences for how you should submit the op-ed – via e-mail, or fax. Following those guidelines will increase the chances of getting your op-ed published.
- Before sending the letter to the editor or op-ed, have someone do a final check for grammatical and spelling errors.
- When you send the op-ed, include a cover paragraph that briefly reminds the editor who you are, referencing any previous contact you may have had. In the cover letter, clearly and concisely explain the importance of the subject to the newspaper's readers. You can also provide background information on the Serve America Act so that the editor knows why the op-ed is relevant.
- Call the paper after submitting your op-ed to give the editor time to review it. Confirm that the op-ed was received and answer any questions.
- Check out <http://www.kidon.com/media-link/us.php> which is a resource for anyone interested in learning more about sending a letter to the editor, contacting an editor or submitting an Op-Ed. Outlets are listed by state and with links.

Making the Pitch for an Editorial

- Contact the editorial page editor, either by email or by phone. You can find the name and usually the email address of the editor on the newspaper website. If it is not readily available, call the newspaper switchboard and ask to be transferred to the editorial page editor.
- It is best to call the editor mid-morning or early afternoon. They are usually in morning meetings first thing in the morning, and editing pieces on deadline at the end of the day. You want to optimize the chance that the editor has time to speak with you.

- Have your pitch ready in a few concise talking points. Identify yourself and why you are calling. You are making the case for why the editorial page editor should use limited editorial space on this issue, so it needs to be a clear and concise pitch.
- Anything you can say to localize or regionalize the issue is good. If your Senator is a co-sponsor or you know they support the legislation, mention that. Thanking members for their leadership is always good.
- Offer to email information and background documents on this issue and the legislation.

Talking Points

The Economic Case for Service

- The average full-time AmeriCorps position costs the federal government \$9,621 plus an education award of \$4,725. The average infrastructure job created by the stimulus package is projected to cost about \$100,000, more than five times what a service job would cost.
- Data shows that young people had a harder time finding employment during the summer of 2008 than at any other time since the 1940's. The youth unemployment rate is now more than 20%. A recent Northeastern University study has found that the percentage of teens employed has already dropped from 45% in 2000 to about 33% today. This is a serious problem with potential long-term effects since early employment experiences help young people to develop skills and relationships that support future career success.
- Nonprofits and low income communities have been hit hard by the economic crisis. They need human capital to help them meet the growing demand for services, especially when philanthropic giving has decreased significantly.
 - Churches, many of which deliver social services to the poor and needy, were expected to raise \$3 billion to \$5 billion less than anticipated in the last quarter of 2008;
 - United Way saw a 68% increase during the past year in the number of calls for basic needs such as securing food, shelter and warm clothing, and is receiving 10,000-15,000 more calls every month compared to 2007
- Increasing the number of funded service positions not only contributes to our society in fundamental ways, but it also creates much needed jobs. With 9.4 million employees and 4.7 million full-time volunteers nationwide, nonprofits constitute 11% of the American workforce—greater than the auto and financial industries combined.

Serve America Act

- Our goal is to pass the Serve America Act, which will reauthorize national service for the first time in 16 years and expand opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve, focused on the most critical problems we face as a country. The Act has tremendous bipartisan support, with leadership from Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY), Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Senator John McCain (R-AZ).

- More than 440 organizations around the country support The Serve America Act, including Habitat for Humanity, AARP, Boys and Girls Clubs, Teach for America, Lions Clubs International, Catholic Charities USA and hundreds more national and local organizations.
- The legislation will:
 - Create 175,000 new service opportunities—many of them fulltime—in areas of national need, including education, health, poverty and clean energy, building on the success of AmeriCorps;
 - Link the full-time education award to the maximum Pell Grant award amount in order to keep up with the rising cost of college;
 - Create a Veterans Service Corps to provide additional support to returning vets and engage them in service;
 - Provide Encore Fellowships for retirees who commit to longer-term service, building on the model of the Senior Corps Programs;
 - Create opportunities for young people in low-income, high-need communities to volunteer to improve their own communities;
 - Establish a Volunteer Generation Fund to help nonprofit organizations recruit and manage more short-and long-term volunteers;
 - Provide a Social Innovation Fund to help social entrepreneurs scale effective problems;
 - Allow faith-and community-based organizations to meet growing needs in effective ways;
 - Improve and expand long-and short-term international service, expanding Volunteers for Prosperity.

Service Can Impact The Nation

- **Service offers a unique strategy for solving problems that the public and private sectors alone have yet to solve:**
 - AmeriCorps members provide intensive national service that goes well beyond episodic volunteering. Full-time and part-time AmeriCorps members serve with community organizations from 20 to 40 hours a week, tackling tough social problems -- illiteracy, school dropouts, disasters, crime, and homelessness.
 - America's largest and most respected voluntary organizations, from Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA to Big Brothers Big Sisters and Habitat for Humanity, participate in and strongly support AmeriCorps. They've seen how the sustained presence of AmeriCorps members helps them accomplish more and manage episodic volunteers more effectively.
 - After participating regularly in Citizen Schools for just one year, students from low-income households outperformed a comparison group on 6 out of 7 academic metrics, including attendance, suspension, and promotion;
 - In the three years since Katrina, AmeriCorps has deployed more than 4,000 corps members to the Gulf, where they refurbished 9,500 homes, built 1,450 new homes, completed 52,000 damage assessments, and trained and supervised more than 227,000 volunteers;
 - In the first six months of 2007, Mile High Youth Corps in Colorado helped 2,500 homes implement comprehensive energy conservation measures, saving homeowners nearly \$300,000 and 1.1 million kWh of energy annually (and reducing CO₂ pollution by more than 5,500,000 pounds);
- **Service is a powerful vehicle that leverages human and financial capital:**

- AmeriCorps members strengthen traditional volunteering and the volunteer sector. AmeriCorps has placed a high priority on recruiting and managing community volunteers as a way to help America's nonprofits extend their reach and impact. Last year, 75,000 AmeriCorps members mobilized or managed 2.2 million community volunteers.
 - AmeriCorps generates new resources for nonprofit, faith-based and community groups. From 2000-2006, AmeriCorps grantees collectively raised more than \$2.6 billion in non-Corporation matching funds—an average of \$376 million a year.
 - Cost-benefit analyses of AmeriCorps programs have concluded that every \$1 of investment results in between \$1.50 and \$3.90 in direct, measurable benefits: children tutored, playgrounds constructed, homeless men and women fed, hurricane victims housed.
 - The cost benefit analysis does not include the enormous indirect savings to society—for example, young people who graduate from high school and go on to tax-paying employment (a high school graduate generates \$300,000 more lifetime tax revenue than a non-graduate), helping steer Americans away from paths that lead toward costly imprisonment and reliance on social services, or connecting the ailing with health services that prevent emergency room visits.
- **Social Entrepreneurs are devising new and innovative approaches to persistent community problems, focusing on delivering results. Some examples:**
 - The average KIPP student starts fifth grade at the 32nd percentile in reading and the 40th percentile in math on national norms-referenced tests, and by the end of the 8th grade has reached the 60th and 82nd percentiles in reading and math, respectively.
 - An MIT study estimates that a young person who graduates from Year Up will earn, on average, \$444,000 in incremental income over their working life, generating an estimated \$137,000 in tax revenues (\$25,000 in state, \$112,000 in federal) in today's dollars.
 - According to researchers at Johns Hopkins University, third graders working with Experience Corps members scored significantly higher on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program than children in control schools.
- **Increased national service capacity leads to increased community service capacity, because national service volunteers have the skills and experience to manage and leverage the energy of community service volunteers:**
 - Following Hurricane Katrina, 1,064 AmeriCorps members working in the Gulf Coast leveraged more than 138,000 volunteers in 2007 alone;
 - In 2007, about 550 Habitat for Humanity AmeriCorps members serving across 200 U.S. affiliates mobilized 215,000 community volunteers, helped build 1700 homes, served 2,000 families, and generated over \$7 million in cash and in-kind resources to support local building efforts across the country.
- **We need to increase voluntary service opportunities because there is not enough capacity to meet the demand of Americans who want to serve:**
 - Demand for national service positions has increased significantly: Applications to City Year are up 180% over last year; Teach for America has 35,000 applications for just 4,000

positions; and the AmeriCorps Online Recruitment System shows a recent spike in applications. For example, in February 2008, 3,159 applications were submitted. In February 2009, 9,731 applications were submitted.

- o YouthBuild turns away 14,000 young people every year for lack of space.
- o A recent study commissioned by AARP revealed significant untapped potential: millions of Americans ages 44-79 said they were likely to increase their volunteering in the next five years.

TEMPLATE: Letter to the Editor Supporting the Serve America Act

Dear Editor,

As this economic crisis deepens at the federal, state, and local level, the demand for critical services is going up while the resources to provide these services are going down. And nonprofit organizations, which are ground zero for providing services in our community, are struggling to meet the need.

The silver lining is that citizens in our city and across this country are signing up to serve at unprecedented rates. Applications for AmeriCorps are already up 208% from last year. Teach For America is expecting 34,000 applicants for 5,000 slots. And locally, nonprofits across our city are overflowing with volunteers who want to help. There is an interest among citizens to serve their communities and be part of the solution. This is a glimmer of hope during these dire economic times, and we should invest in it.

Right now, there is bipartisan legislation going through Congress that would invest in this citizen service. It's called the Serve America Act, and it's being sponsored by Senators Kennedy (D-MA), Hatch (R-UT), Mikulski (D-MD), and Enzi (R-WY). This bill expands opportunities for citizens to serve, directs this service toward our nation's most urgent challenges, and invests in new, innovative solutions to our nation's most persistent social problems. The Senate is voting on the bill this week.

The urgency for this legislation is now. The way out of this economic crisis is to invest in our citizens—their service, their innovations, and their will to make a difference. I encourage everyone to call their Senators right now and ask them to vote YES on the Serve America Act this week. Our city, and our nation, can't wait.

Sincerely,