



**Corporation for National and Community Service  
America Forward Agency Transition Memo**

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), whose mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic participation through service and volunteering, has invested in thousands of nonprofit and service organizations that are making a difference across the country through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and many more programs. The emphasis of both the national service work supported by CNCS and the programs funded through the Social Innovation Fund on outcomes-driven impact directly aligns with the work of America Forward's Coalition organizations and our belief in the need to make more effective government policy and funding decisions in order to measurably improve lives.

America Forward's Coalition of more than 70 entrepreneurial organizations across the country are leading the way in the use of cutting edge data and research to pursue bold, innovative, outcomes-driven solutions to some of the most difficult challenges associated with K-12 education, higher education, workforce development, and poverty alleviation. Our organizations are constantly learning about what works, developing new innovations, measuring outcomes, and achieving real results in their communities. National service has provided a key source of human capital to leverage the impact of our organizations and deliver results in the communities we serve.

Building on the impact of CNCS's work to date, there is an incredible opportunity for President-elect Trump to provide great jobs and training opportunities for all Americans, while simultaneously increasing government efficiency, by both supporting and scaling the work of the Social Innovation Fund to advance the movement towards an outcomes-driven policymaking environment and by increasing our nation's investment in national service to create more opportunities for Americans to serve.

America Forward has identified below a few policy proposals to help support these efforts.

**Social Innovation**

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) is an innovative program that awards grants to and works with existing grant-making institutions to direct resources to innovative community-based nonprofit organizations. The purpose of the SIF is to improve the lives of people in low-income communities by increasing the impact and scale of these innovative community-based organizations and approaches in the areas of youth development, economic opportunity, and healthy futures. In addition to growing promising community-based solutions, SIF funding is also used to test Pay for Success—a new approach for government to fund proven community-based solutions.

The significant emphasis on using **evidence of program impact, a funding model that** utilizes public funding to **leverage private dollars**, and the focus on **innovative community-based solutions** are elements that make SIF a unique federal program and one that has realized significant results in only a few years. Namely, through these grants upwards of half a million individuals have been served in low-



income communities across the country. And the evaluations of these SIF programs completed to date, have found positive effects in the areas of workforce training, employment services, personal (income) savings, reading education, and childhood health.

To date, SIF has awarded over \$240 million in grants to intermediaries since 2010. This funding has leveraged \$528 million in private and other nonfederal commitments through a 1:1 non-federal match. More than 100 cities in 35 states and the District of Columbia have engaged in this important program and leveraged the public and private resources through the Social Innovation Fund to advance community solutions to improve the lives of Americans in their communities.

## **Policy Proposals**

### **1. Support and Scale the Social Innovation Fund**

Data and evidence should be used to develop policy, allocate budgets, and award grant dollars in order to improve the effectiveness of our federal programs. The Social Innovation Fund is uniquely positioned as a federal program that is rooted in evidence, data, and outcomes-driven decision-making and it plays an integral role in the evidence-driven policy movement. To continue to advance the impact of the Social Innovation Fund, the next Administration should:

- a.** Preserve full or increased funding for the Social Innovation Fund, including both the Classic and Pay for Success programs, and continue to promote the program evaluation efforts that enable organizations to improve their evidence base
- b.** Provide smaller innovation grants that support the development of new models that enable low cost structure programs, those with limited access to philanthropic support, or those serving rural communities to tackle pressing social challenges
- c.** Clarify that the match funding is not subject to federal requirements regarding allowable uses of funds
- d.** Increase the number of national service programs that receive funding and support through the fund by granting a competitive preference or establishing a set-aside for organizations that incorporate service strategies into their grant applications.

## **National Service**

National service has garnered support from thought leaders and policymakers on both sides of the aisle. Voters too overwhelmingly support investing in service year opportunities, with 83% of voters in presidential battleground states favoring maintaining or increasing the federal investment in national service.<sup>1</sup> Both our national leaders and citizens clearly recognize that through service programs, our nation successfully invests in the development of young adults as they transition into the workforce, expands the reach and increases the impact of community organizations, and provides cost-effective solutions to some of the most pressing challenges of our time.



The results achieved by national service programs in increasing high school graduation rates, improving college access and success, re-engaging opportunity youth, rebuilding neighborhoods, and connecting diverse communities are greater than many other higher cost interventions. And every federal dollar invested in national service generates returns to society of \$3.95, in terms of higher earnings, increased output, and other community benefits.

**Service provides cost-effective human capital to scale proven strategies that build our infrastructure and address the root causes of poverty.** Today, outcomes-driven service year programs are increasing reading scores, reducing the dropout rate, increasing college access, helping people find the services they need, and rebuilding and restoring communities hard-hit by disasters. Full-time corps members in VISTA, LIFT, Reading Partners and other programs are recruiting volunteers to help and leveraging millions of hours of service in low-income communities.

**National service opportunities connect individuals with diverse backgrounds in common purpose, increasing the bridging social capital that breaks down divides, increasing understanding, and building networks for low-income Americans that help them navigate education pathways, find jobs, and strengthen leadership skills.** Nine out of ten AmeriCorps alumni express confidence in interacting with diverse people and respecting others' values.<sup>ii</sup> Imagine what a different country we might have if a formative experience of every emerging adult was a year building skills while getting to know people with different backgrounds.

**Research has shown that service year programs can reconnect opportunity youth to education or employment while simultaneously rebuilding civic engagement.** There are more than 5.5 million 16-24 year olds disconnected from school and work, and these young Americans experience unemployment rates double the national average. A recent survey has shown that one unemployed youth costs federal and state governments more than \$4,100 per year in lost tax revenue and benefits received.<sup>iii</sup> However, youth without a high school degree who participate in national service programs are 51 percent more likely to find employment on average.<sup>iv</sup>

## Policy Proposals

### 1. Create More AmeriCorps Opportunities

The current demand for full-time service positions widely outpaces the available supply and many Americans eager to give back to their country and gain valuable skills and traits through service work are unable to do so. In fact, hundreds of thousands of Americans who want to perform a service year are turned away due to limited openings, and hundreds of thousands more do not even know it is an option. To address this disconnect, the next Administration should:

- a. Reauthorize AmeriCorps at the 250,000 level and actively purpose full appropriations to reach this level by 2019



- b. Establish a unit within the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to work with other federal agencies to combine agency resources with Segal Education Awards to establish AmeriCorps programs that address the agencies' missions
- c. Create a streamlined system for programs not funded by CNCS to secure Segal Education Awards for their positions and establish a unit to support these partnerships
- d. Make all grants fixed price grants, allowing for increased grants operating in areas with higher costs of living

## **2. Increase the Impact of AmeriCorps**

The impact of national service has been continuously demonstrated and the outcomes rigorously identified. However, the current grant process does not fully account for the outcomes-driven nature of the model and instead places greater emphasis on compliance over impact. To align the evidence of service year programs with the allocation of national service funding, the next Administration should:

- a. Enable AmeriCorps to be more easily integrated into place-based initiatives by allowing grant modifications, joint applications, and joint performance measures
- b. Institute pay for performance contracts in lieu of competition for established, evidence-driven programs
- c. Emphasize performance rather than compliance in all grant monitoring and streamline requirements to make compliance easier

## **3. Encourage More Young Americans to Serve**

The more than 5.5 million 16-24 year olds disconnected from school and work, a group known as “opportunity youth,” that cost taxpayers \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services.<sup>v</sup> National service can serve as a key component in changing the trajectory of these young people’s lives and helping them to gain the skills and networks they need for education and employment success. In order to engage more young people in national service, the next Administration should:

- a. Issue an executive order to offer three years of non-competitive eligibility for all full-time AmeriCorps members
- b. Increase the AmeriCorps and VISTA minimum living allowances and allow for greater variation by locality based on cost of living\
- c. Actively encourage all programs, including VISTA, grant-funded programs, education award-only programs, and National Civilian Community Corps, to join the Service Year Exchange



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<sup>i</sup> TargetPoint Consulting. (2015). Republicans and democrats overwhelmingly support national service. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/VoicesPoll>

<sup>ii</sup> White House Council on Community Solutions. (2012). Final report: community solutions for opportunity youth. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.serve.gov/sites/default/files/ctools/12\\_0604whccs\\_finalreport.pdf](http://www.serve.gov/sites/default/files/ctools/12_0604whccs_finalreport.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Young Invincibles. (2014) In This Together: The Hidden Cost of Young Adult Unemployment, Retrieved from <http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/In-This-Together-The-Hidden-Cost-of-Young-Adult-Unemployment.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service (2013). Report: Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalservice.gov/volunteering-pathway-employment-report>

<sup>v</sup> C.R Belfield, H.M. Levin and R. Rosen. "Economic Value of Opportunity Youth," January 2012, [www.civcenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.civcenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf); <https://opportunitynation.org/latest-news/5-6-million-youths-school-work/>