

*The Grantmaker Forum on
Community & National Service*

**CALLING THE NATION TO SERVE:
A PHILANTHROPIC PERSPECTIVE**

Presented by

**THE GRANTMAKER FORUM ON
COMMUNITY & NATIONAL SERVICE**

March 4, 2002

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I. BACKGROUND

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service is the only organized group of grantmakers specifically focused on service and volunteering. Our paid membership includes foundations, large and small, whose assets collectively exceed \$30 billion. The Grantmaker Forum has been working together for almost a decade, sharing our knowledge of service and volunteering programs and promoting our belief that service and volunteering are critical civic engagement strategies for building a healthy democracy and strong communities.

In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush described how September 11th reminds us that “We are citizens with obligations to each other, to our country and to history... (that we must) think less of the goods we can accumulate and more about the good we can do.” The Grantmaker Forum is pleased that the President and Members of Congress – Republicans and Democrats alike – recognize service and volunteering as strategies for engaging all Americans in addressing the needs and solving the problems of our communities and nation.

The growth of America’s national service and community volunteering programs -- their strength and diversity-- is in part due to the long-time support of the philanthropic sector. The Grantmaker Forum and our members know the field and have experience to add to the current public debate. It is in the spirit of commitment, cooperation and interest that we present our reactions to and suggestions for the President’s call to serve.

II. THE PRESIDENT’S CALL TO SERVE -- AFFIRMING OUR BELIEFS

Engaging citizens in civic life is the work of all sectors. It is best pursued as a partnership with clear purpose that relies on the leadership and bully pulpit of elected officials; the financial support of the public, private and philanthropic sectors; and the organizing and service delivery capacity of the nonprofit sector.

The Grantmaker Forum applauds the President and Members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, for their leadership in promoting the value and ethic of service and volunteering. National service and community volunteering deserve public support, and must remain a bipartisan effort.

We believe in expanding opportunities to serve....

The President has identified many new ways to serve and has set forth the expectation that we each have something to give. The Grantmaker Forum shares that vision. Service has the potential to bring us together, to bridge our differences, and to remind us of what it means to be an American.

Given the nature of the Grantmaker Forum's mission – to promote the value and ethic of service and volunteering – we are especially pleased with the President's call to increase dramatically the number of AmeriCorps members performing service domestically, to double the number of Peace Corps volunteers who can serve our nation's interests overseas, and to support the contributions made by older Americans with an expansion of the Senior Service Corps. With a greater number and range of national service opportunities available, many will accept the invitation to serve. The established systems and infrastructures will welcome them and receive their service.

The President has put forth an exciting vision of a truly engaged America, where every American is called to contribute a year of service to the nation, or four thousand hours over the course of a lifetime. To realize this vision will require thoughtful planning, a new set of capacities and supports, and the engagement of a wide spectrum of experienced volunteers and organizations.

We believe in public/private partnership....

Because we believe that there is a role for all sectors to play in deepening and broadening our nation's commitment to service and volunteering, we are heartened by the President's leadership and his proposals. The President's call to expand national service is backed with financial resources – public funding to support everything from stipends for full-time service to training community volunteers in disaster preparedness.

The President's proposal challenges the philanthropic and private sectors to do their parts. The USA Freedom Corps now frames new opportunities for government, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, philanthropy, and the business sector to build on the experiences of the past and to forge creative and significant partnerships for the future. The Grantmaker Forum is poised to assist in communicating the role that philanthropy can and must play in these partnerships.

III. THE PRESIDENT'S CALL TO SERVE – WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE

Our experience with the many facets of service and volunteering leads us to identify several areas that we believe require more discussion and attention if we are to attain a national vision of an engaged America.

We believe that high quality service-learning cultivates a life-long commitment to service and citizenship....

The Grantmaker Forum strongly encourages the President to incorporate K-12 service-learning into his own vision for an engaged America – to provide leadership for the practice, and financial support for the schools that stand ready to provide our children with high quality

service-learning experiences. Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that combines community service with classroom study, yielding an enriched educational experience while conveying the value of civic responsibility. It provides students with a sense of connection to the community. There is perhaps no better way to start a young person off on a journey of engaged citizenship.

We believe that national service is community-based....

The Grantmaker Forum believes that community and neighborhood institutions have critical roles to play in engaging all Americans in service and volunteering. A national call to serve helps motivate many Americans to give of themselves for purposes greater than themselves. But to ensure that all Americans hear that call, the President's proposal needs to support the infrastructures rooted in communities, the community organizations that involve people of all backgrounds, ethnicities and income levels. We hope that the systems, supports and structures that are put in place to realize the President's vision will bridge the gap between neighborhoods and nation and provide meaningful ways for communities to be involved in defining their own needs, setting priorities and engaging their citizens in service.

We believe that a national call to serve should value the many ways in which Americans serve their nation....

The members of the Grantmaker Forum conceive of service and volunteering as a value and a strategy to achieve community engagement and neighborhood problem-solving. We would like to see the President's proposal expand its definition of service and volunteering to include the multitude of ways in which Americans volunteer and contribute to a healthy democracy, from community volunteering and national service to community activism and public policy advocacy, from neighborhood emergency preparedness and service clubs to volunteer political activity and public service.

We believe that an expansion of service and volunteering will need expanded capacity in the nonprofit sector....

Since September 11th and now even more so with the President's call to serve, our nonprofit and voluntary sector is being inundated with requests from concerned Americans seeking opportunities to serve and volunteer their time. The capacity of the sector will be, if it has not been already, stretched to the limits of its ability to effectively incorporate the available talent and provide a meaningful and valuable service experience. A good volunteer experience, one that will contribute to a life-long ethic of service, provides a volunteer with training, recognition, supportive supervision, and opportunities to become engaged in learning. The service must be meaningful to the volunteer and must add value to the community.

As the Grantmaker Forum examines the USA Freedom Corps proposal, we question whether sufficient attention has been paid to the stress that will be placed on the infrastructure of the voluntary sector in accommodating the new volunteers and service members. We urge the President to engage the nonprofit sector in discussions of how best to prepare and support the sector for its increased responsibility.

IV. THE PRESIDENT'S CALL TO SERVE – WHAT THE GRANTMAKER FORUM WILL DO

The Grantmaker Forum can play a unique role at this moment in time, serving as a link to the philanthropic sector and as a neutral convener of organizations and institutions concerned with advancing the value, ethic and practice of service and volunteering. We are well positioned to clarify and help define the role that can be played by philanthropy in support of the nation's objectives, and we can help attract new philanthropic resources to the endeavor.

The Grantmaker Forum regularly supports its members by convening groups for discussions, organizing educational sessions, publishing reports, and identifying model programs. We are prepared to:

- Convene groups of grantmakers to discuss the USA Freedom Corps proposal, to both educate grantmakers about the opportunities to contribute to the proposed expansion of AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and the Peace Corps, and to gain understanding of the philanthropic perspective on what has been proposed to date.
- Educate and partner with the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Points of Light Foundation, Independent Sector, and other national organizations in this work.
- Educate policymakers about the value of service-learning, bringing the collective knowledge of grantmakers and their grantees to the discussion.
- Engage philanthropy, our grantees, and our public agency partners in constructive dialogue about the role of national service members and community volunteers in community, regional, and national security.
- Identify and publicize model programs of service and volunteering that are designed to increase civic engagement and can demonstrate successful results.

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service is encouraged by the President's proposal to expand opportunities to serve and volunteer. We stand ready to serve as a resource in efforts to engage all Americans in effective and meaningful service, and to support the field in developing and delivering service of value to communities and the nation.

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The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, founded in 1993, is an organized group of grantmakers representing the whole spectrum of philanthropy, including private foundations, individual donors, corporate foundations and community foundations. The Grantmaker Forum is devoted to raising awareness about the value and power of service and volunteering, and maximizing opportunities for all Americans to serve.

The Grantmaker Forum is organized around the belief that service, giving of oneself for purposes greater than oneself, is a fundamental value of American democracy; it is a value that should be supported and celebrated. The organization pursues a two-part agenda, to both engage philanthropy in support of service as well as to provide leadership in identifying, creating and promoting effective service policies and practices. The mission captures this vision.

The mission of the Grantmaker Forum is to provide leadership and information about the value of service and volunteering and to encourage private and public investment in the field as a means of strengthening communities and building a healthy democracy.

The Grantmaker Forum pursues its mission through its sponsorship of events, community dialogues, issue-based research, networking, publications and an annual conference. The Grantmaker Forum is an official affinity group of the Council on Foundations.

The Grantmaker Forum holds that in order for the service ethic to be promoted and valued broadly, it must be nurtured by the public, private, and non profit sectors. The public sector's affirmative efforts to encourage an ethic of service and volunteering are reflected in such federally-funded national service programs as the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps. The private sector's role in promoting an ethic of service and civic engagement is demonstrated by employee volunteer programs as well as corporate giving programs. The nonprofit sector makes its own unique contribution by relying on and engaging with community volunteers who donate time and money to the delivery of programs and services to those in need.

Membership in the Grantmaker Forum is open to individuals and organizations committed to promoting the value and ethic of service and volunteering. The voluntary dues structure is designed to encourage the participation of all qualifying groups. To join or for more information, please contact the staff at the address below.

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