

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

SERVICE AS A NATIONAL MOVEMENT NOT JUST ANOTHER FEDERAL PROGRAM

Prepared by

The Public Policy Task Force

of the

Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service

“Service is about using the resources of the nation—public, private and philanthropic—to promote big citizenship, not big government.”

April 1997

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April 1997

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background	2
I. Roles and Responsibilities to Support High Quality Service Programs	3
Participation	3
Partnership.....	4
Communications	4
Flexibility	4
What Can a National Policy Accomplish?.....	4
The “National” in Community and National Service.....	5
Philanthropy’s Role.....	5
II. Shared Responsibility: Financial and Otherwise	6
Essential Ingredients of Effective Programs	6
Who Are the Partners?	7
Unique to Government.....	7
Unique to Philanthropy	8
III. Accountability and Program Quality	9
Building on What Works and Why	9
The Purpose of Data Collection	9
The Practice of Data Collection	10
The Role of Philanthropy	10
A Note of Realism.....	10
Conclusion	11

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Grantmaker Forum sees service in broad terms: as a **community-building** strategy—harnessing the energy of a few to the benefit of many; as a **problem-solving** strategy—complementing the effort and energy of full-time professionals with the vision and sense of mission of part- or full-time volunteers; and as a **nation-building** strategy—cultivating a sense of civic identity and national purpose. This paper, which seeks to summarize the Forum’s perspective on a range of critical issues related to community and national service, expounds on the following key points:

1. Service is a **local program** with a **national purpose**.
2. Whether performed by a volunteer or by someone receiving a small living subsidy or salary, service is defined by the **personal commitment** of time and energy to address needs and accomplish goals for the greater good.
3. Service embodies key values essential to a civil society and fundamental to the preservation of American democracy: **civic participation, community responsibility and charity**.
4. There is a need for a **national policy on service** that ensures access to service opportunities for all Americans; endorses service as a strategy for community problem-solving; transfers the lessons learned by one community to another; defines how best to use service; and coordinates the resources of government with the resources of others to build strong, successful programs that achieve measurable outcomes for the community and nation. A large-scale, federally funded service initiative may offer a means of achieving the economic, social and nation-building benefits lost as a result of downsizing the nation’s military.
5. It is appropriate and necessary for **government at all levels** to be a substantial and **enduring partner** in the full constellation of those who share responsibility for **promoting and funding** community and national service.
6. Service should be supported through **partnerships** that include the public, private, not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors. This **partnership** should take advantage of the resources and capacity of each sector in order to provide the full continuum of service, from the occasional volunteer who, without remuneration, feeds the hungry, to students learning through Service Learning curricula, to the full-time, salaried or subsidized servers who participate in VISTA, the Conservation Corps, the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, the Senior Corps, or the United States military.
7. The **success of service** for the server and the community **depends** on how programs are framed and managed. **Programs need an infrastructure**: the capacity to provide training and supervision to the servers, the ability to collect and **use information** from the servers and the community served and the ability to provide **incentives** to encourage participation in service activities.
8. The involvement of all sectors in support of service should be defined first and foremost by what will **strengthen and improve the quality of programs at the community level** and achieve the desired outcomes for both the server and the community served.

BACKGROUND

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service is comprised of grantmakers who are bound together by a belief that service—the effort of giving of oneself for purposes greater than oneself—represents a core value of American democracy and that it is best achieved through a partnership between the public, private, not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors.

Founded in 1993, the Grantmaker Forum is committed to building greater public awareness of and appreciation for the power of volunteering and serving, both as a strategy for building a civil society and as a means of community problem-solving. To further this purpose, the Grantmaker Forum's Public Policy Task Force tracks policy developments related to service and seeks opportunities to clarify and share the philanthropic perspective on service-related issues, from governance to program financing, quality and evaluation.

Historically, grantmakers have played an important role in supporting community service programs and activities. In particular, since the enactment of the 1990 National and Community Service Act, grantmakers have been asked to serve as partners in nurturing the nation's community-based system of national service—an expansion that was fueled in part by the availability of federal funding. As Congress considers the future of community and national service, the Grantmaker Forum offers its experience and perspective on a number of critical issues.

While service is happening in communities across the country outside the realm of federally funded initiatives, the Grantmaker Forum recognizes the need for and importance of a meaningful federal role in building a strong national network of service programs.

Underlying this position is a belief that national and community service is far more than a program; service has the potential to strengthen our nation's character. The Grantmaker Forum believes that . . .

- *Service is a fundamental building block of a civil society;*
- *Service cultivates a sense of personal and civic responsibility;*
- *Service is a strategy for solving a range of community problems;*
- *Service varies in intensity from part-time volunteerism to full-time paid service;*
- *Service, when it is well-conceived and implemented, can be a cost-effective complement to the work of professionals;*
- *Service includes a range of activities performed by different people using different means;*
- *Service is a life-long habit that can be most easily acquired early in life;*
- *Service works best when it is community-led and government-supported; and*
- *Service is a fundamental American tradition.*

I. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY SERVICE PROGRAMS

Service happens in communities. Service is performed by the young for the old and the old for the young. Service knows no racial or ethnic boundaries. Service involves all community institutions: schools and churches, synagogues and youth centers, hospitals and voluntary organizations, police departments and child care centers. Service can happen on a part-time, some-time, or full-time basis. Service, whether it is performed by a volunteer or by someone receiving a small living subsidy or salary, is defined by the personal commitment of time and energy to address needs and accomplish goals for the greater good.

“Service is giving of oneself for purposes greater than oneself.”

It is this pursuit of greater purpose that distinguishes service from employment or other skills-building activities.

Given the important historic and civic value of service to American democracy, the Grantmaker Forum believes that expanding opportunities to serve and providing access to all those who wish to serve is the responsibility of the public sector, in partnership with the private, not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors. The involvement of all sectors in support of service should be defined first and foremost by what will strengthen and improve the quality of programs at the community level and achieve the desired outcomes for both the server and the community served.

The cornerstones of a successful national service initiative include:

- **Participation** - Building broad-based, non-partisan support for the American tradition of service in order to encourage participation by all Americans;
- **Partnership** - Involving all sectors in support and promotion of community and national service;

- **Communications** - Establishing lines of communication between programs and between and within the infrastructures that exist to support programs to maximize high quality program results; and
- **Flexibility** - Maximizing flexibility in managing and delivering service programs so that programs are responsive to the needs and constraints of the communities within which they operate.

PARTICIPATION

In recent years there has been much talk about the need for civic renewal and the importance of building a more civil society. The values and behaviors associated with these essential goals must be taught and nurtured. Service is a means by which to instill a sense of personal and civic responsibility. Service as an ethic is fundamental to achieving the more civil society we all desire.

The Grantmaker Forum believes there is a need for a **national policy** that ensures access to all those who wish to serve; a national policy that provides service opportunities for **all Americans**; a national policy that nourishes local service programs in the context of national purpose; and a national policy that invests the nation's dollars where its values are by providing direct and indirect subsidies to encourage service on both a part-time and full-time basis.

Part-time service is good, but by itself, it is not good enough. The value-added of performing full-time service is more than sufficient to justify the cost of a small subsidy or salary. Full-time servers bring continuity and consistency to the tasks they perform. In national disasters, whether it's the Mississippi flood or the Arkansas tornado, the Red Cross disaster relief workers may move on, but the full-time stipended server remains. By engaging in full-time service, young people can learn about themselves and

about others in ways that can transform their vision of **PARTNERSHIP**

The **national policy** should encourage **partnerships** that take advantage of the resources and capacity of each sector—the private, public, philanthropic and not-for-profit—to provide the full continuum of service, from the occasional volunteers who provide literacy services to new immigrants without remuneration or subsidy, to students learning through Service Learning curricula, to the full-time subsidized servers who participate in VISTA, the Conservation Corps, the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, the Senior Corps, or the United States military. For many who serve in these capacities, stipends and subsidies make participation possible. There are many compelling reasons for the nation to encourage its citizens to serve, and there are many ways to do so, from continuing to offer tax incentives to those who can afford to make their time available, to providing financial incentives and subsidies to maximize participation.

COMMUNICATIONS

As programs grow, the need for **communication** between programs, servers, states and communities will continue to grow as well. Information about what works and why must be shared so that there is an opportunity to benefit from the collective experience, to build on what works and to discard that which does not.

FLEXIBILITY

The infrastructure that implements national policy must aim to increase the capacity of communities to use service effectively. States and localities must have the **flexibility** to organize themselves and their programs according to their resources and capacities. The role of the national infrastructure should be to posit guiding principles, leaving methods and practice where they belong, at the local level. Service should respond to locally defined needs in the context of a national purpose. Service embodies key values—civic participation, community responsibility and charity—that are fundamental and essential to the preservation of American democracy.

WHAT CAN A NATIONAL POLICY ACCOMPLISH?

what is and what may be.

An effective national policy on service should:

- Advocate for **all Americans to engage in service**—promoting the benefits of service;
- Develop national standards for effective service in order to ensure **program quality**;
- Promote and monitor **service as a strategy** for solving community problems;
- Advance and **disseminate models of service** based on community experience;
- Identify financial and organizational **resources, both governmental and non-governmental**, to be directed to states that are in need of additional support; and
- Collect and disseminate information about **how service is being provided and used, by whom, at what cost, to what end and with what effectiveness**.

Those responsible for implementing a national policy on service must encourage and establish:

- Strong **partnerships** across sectors with each sector contributing as appropriate;
- Support for **service in all of its incarnations**: part-time, full-time and sometimes;
- Resources to **stimulate opportunities** to serve where none exist;
- **Policies** (including match requirements) that take into account the **capacity and limits** of local and non-governmental funding in communities;
- Stronger **networks** across programs, states and the nation to support service;
- Integrated **data collection systems** that minimize program-level burdens and maximize the value of the information collected;
- Good **process research** that informs how best to organize service to greatest effect;
- Resources to support continuous **program improvement** through data collection, analysis and dissemination;

- Longitudinal research on the *impact* of service on the server and the served; and
- *Long-term commitments* (financial and organizational) to support community and national service by the public, private, not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors.

The national role should facilitate community-based service initiatives and opportunities. There are specific functions that may be best performed at the national level because they are cost efficient and form a basis for cross-site information sharing. The national role should include the capacity to:

- Help states which then help communities identify, define and respond to the *training and technical assistance* needs required to implement high quality, effective programs;
- Develop a *national, or support a state-level, database of service opportunities* to match servers with programs;
- Help states which then help communities *match program models to community needs*;
- Work with states which then work with communities on the development of *incentives and rewards* to encourage participation in service (for example, if one company in Boston is offering employees wage supplements for service participation, share that model with other communities around the nation);
- Forge national partnerships and help states forge more local partnerships that are needed to *ensure that all program components are in place*, from the infrastructure that supports training, supervision and technical assistance to the data collection and analysis needed for continuous program improvement as well as cost-benefit ratios and long-term impacts;

- *Promote what works* by providing resources to encourage effective models and withdrawing resources from programs that are failing to meet objectives; and
- Test models to develop *new ways of funding and implementing* programs that work.

THE “NATIONAL” IN COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL SERVICE

There is a need for leadership through policy, opportunity through access, community capacity-building through resources and systems of support. A coherent national policy on service should ensure access to service opportunities for all Americans; endorse service as a strategy for community problem-solving; transfer the lessons learned by one community to another; define how best to use service; and coordinate the resources of government with the resources of others to build strong, successful programs that achieve measurable outcomes for the community and nation.

PHILANTHROPY’S ROLE

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service is dedicated to encouraging others in the field of philanthropy to support community and national service. The Grantmaker Forum sees support of service in broad terms: as a **community-building** strategy—harnessing the energy of a few to the benefit of many; as a **problem-solving** strategy—complementing the effort and energy of full-time professionals with the vision and sense of mission of part-time or full-time volunteers; and as a **nation-building** strategy—cultivating a deep sense of civic identity and national purpose.

II. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: FINANCIAL AND OTHERWISE

It is appropriate and necessary for government at all levels to be an enduring partner in the full constellation of those who share responsibility for promoting and funding community and national service.

Service is itself a program: a program that helps develop skills and confidence and cultivates a sense of personal and social responsibility. Service is also a strategy for enhancing program capacity. At a time of limited resources, full-time subsidized service can provide a relatively low cost means by which to complement the efforts of professionals who are working to solve community problems and meet community needs. Attention must be paid to how best to leverage available resources to fund service in a way that credits its potential to achieve multiple objectives.¹

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

In order to fully develop the potential of service, it is important to define the elements of successful

¹ In the late 1970's the Junior League of St. Louis launched a youth development program for middle school students which incorporated service-learning as a key element. The evaluation demonstrated the effectiveness of the model not only in improved self esteem and positive personal outlooks among program participants, but in reducing the rate of teen pregnancy among program participants. The model was adopted by the National Association of Junior Leagues and implemented in communities across the nation. Eventually the model, which includes a curriculum, was adopted by the State of California as a demonstration project. It has been subject to evaluation throughout and has produced impressive results. This example demonstrates how service is both a program and a strategy.

programs. While the specific combination of ingredients may differ depending on the nature of the service program (part-time volunteer to full-time paid), some combination of the following *must* be in place to ensure high quality service placements:

- Program planning and supervision;
- Technical assistance and training;
- Needs assessments;
- Volunteer orientation;
- On-going data collection for continuous program improvement and monitoring;
- Stipends, subsidies and/or rewards;
- Tax credits and deductions;
- Communication and dissemination systems; and
- Longitudinal evaluations.

The cost of all of these components can not be borne by one sector alone. Drawing on the resources of the public, private, not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors, as appropriate, partnerships must collectively support all of the components of high quality programs. If one partner is able to provide funding for stipends, for example, there must be another means by which the infrastructure that provides training, supervision, data collection and evaluation is supported as well. In the absence of the full complement of essential ingredients, programs are doomed to fail either because they are bereft of quality or lack the evidence of success.

WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?

The server is a partner:

Often overlooked, the server donates time and energy, giving of oneself for purposes greater than oneself. The server may postpone a college education, accept a stipend that is substantially less than a fair market wage, or volunteer on weekends and evenings to meet pressing needs. The server is the personification of “shared responsibility.”

Non-profits and voluntary agencies are partners:

They train and supervise paid and unpaid volunteers. They introduce the server to the community and focus service to solve community problems so that the server can make an important contribution and also acquire confidence, competence and compassion in the process. They design and implement programs that make good use of servers and professional staff.

K-12 schools and institutions of higher learning are partners:

As both a recipient and provider of service, schools are an essential partner in the process of inculcating the ethic of service, promoting civic participation and cultivating the “habits of the heart.”

Business is a partner:

The company that provides release-time for employees to volunteer is modeling “shared responsibility” and encouraging its employees to do the same. The company that donates funds or provides in-kind contributions to support local programs is doing what it can to encourage service.

Philanthropy is a partner:

Long a supporter of programs that rely on service, philanthropy has an important role to play in supporting and evaluating new models of service, funding programs that employ service as a strategy, and providing resources necessary to conduct research and evaluation to measure the impact of service on the server and the community served. Philanthropy will never have enough resources to underwrite the cost of all of the service programs that are necessary and **beneficial to the nation as a whole**, but philanthropy brings funds to the table that, if used well, will have a multiplying effect.

Government is a partner:

A critical partner in the process, government has multiple responsibilities in the field of service. First, the nation’s leaders—from the President at the federal level to public officials across the land at the most local level—should use their bully pulpits to encourage the American tradition of service, to promote civic engagement through participation in service. Second, the federal government can continue to lead by example by adopting a national policy that includes resources to stimulate local support. Federal support can include tax incentives as well as direct program subsidies. Federal support should be used as a magnet to draw in other investors, recognizing that program costs may not be borne by the federal government alone.

Together, these partners share responsibility and achieve a **whole** that is greater than the sum of its parts.

UNIQUE TO GOVERNMENT

The federal government is in the unique position of providing a base of sustained financial support that enables communities large and small, urban and rural, rich and poor, to implement service as a strategy of community problem-solving. Federal funding can take into account the variation in capacity of states and localities to fund their own program components, ensuring that despite the limits of personal or local resources and wealth, all who wish to serve are able to do so. As national service proves effective for addressing local problems, then state and local governments will also seek creative ways to sustain programs.

Historically the federal government has sponsored young Americans in military service, and in exchange for their participation, the government has provided a living subsidy as well as educational and medical benefits. During this post-Cold War era, with a shrinking military, the opportunity for young people to perform military service in duty to their country is limited. A federally funded community and national service initiative offers an important alternative means of achieving the economic, social and nation-building benefits that we have lost as a result of the downsizing of our national defense.

UNIQUE TO PHILANTHROPY

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service stands ready to support partnerships with the public, not-for-profit and private sectors, to bring its own resources to bear and to encourage other members of the philanthropic community to do the same. The Grantmaker Forum believes there are unexploited opportunities for foundations to encourage grantees to incorporate service as a component of their programs, and the Forum pledges to share that message with the philanthropic

community. In addition, because of the flexibility of philanthropic dollars, foundations may be sources of support for the long-term research and evaluations that are needed to assess the effectiveness of different service strategies and to gauge the impact of service on the server and, over the long-term, on society.

**Community service is more than just a program;
it is a way of thinking and living,
a way of making a difference in the lives of
individuals and communities.**

III. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROGRAM QUALITY

In order to sustain high quality programs, it is necessary to have accountability—not only accountability for expenditures, but accountability for program quality and impact. Those who are footing the bill and those who are dedicating their time—whether it is government, philanthropy, the private sector, program participants, communities, or some combination of all—have the right to see results. Accountability means setting standards, issuing guidelines, collecting data, assessing progress and making policy and program adjustments as necessary.

BUILDING ON WHAT WORKS AND WHY

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service believes that it is essential that resources be available to carry out credible data collection and conduct meaningful, on-going analysis to demonstrate the impact of community and national service and to achieve continuous program improvement. The cost of the data collection and analysis needed to ensure continuous program improvement must be included as an essential program cost. While many may endorse the value of long-term evaluations to test hypotheses about service as a strategy for social transformation, the resources for such an endeavor are secondary to those required for program implementation and continuous program improvement.

There isn't a business in the country that could maintain its market share over the long term without demonstrating quality. Companies collect information and use it to improve their results. The single largest service program in the nation is the United States military. The Department of Defense would never risk national security by failing to continuously assess its strengths and weaknesses.

THE PURPOSE OF DATA COLLECTION

There are at least three distinct reasons why information needs to be collected.

- 1) For purposes of *national policy* and continued support, data need to be gathered to test the short- and long-term value of service to society. Is service achieving civic engagement, increasing the sense of personal and community responsibility? Are communities benefitting from the performance of service by adding value in the quantity as well as quality of problem solving? This data collection should not duplicate program data collection efforts and should be performed by outside evaluators working cooperatively with program staff.
- 2) For purposes of *continuous program improvement*, programs need to collect and analyze data that tell whether they are meeting their own programmatic and process objectives. Every funded service program should have measurable outcomes and the dollars necessary to monitor and report on the achievement of those outcomes. Without this basic capacity, programs should not be funded.
- 3) For purposes of *compliance*, data must be gathered by programs to demonstrate responsible expenditures and the achievement of process objectives. These are short-term accountability measures, and while they are important, they emphasize immediate results. In the interest of short-term accountability, we should not lose sight of the long-term program outcomes that well may justify continued and far reaching support.

THE PRACTICE OF DATA COLLECTION

Methods of assessing community and national service must accommodate the different purposes of data collection and the varied levels on which impact may occur. There is a need for non-bureaucratic uniformity in standards and methods of data collection, particularly for programs in receipt of government funding, to ensure comparability across settings and to ease the effort of data collection and analysis, so that information can be used for multiple purposes.

- 1) To ensure continuous program improvement, there is a need for data to be collected and used by the program. This form of data collection is critical to successful programs and should be incorporated into program design.
- 2) Cost-benefit ratios are helpful in framing the value of service as a strategy for solving community problems. Does service add value to existing program efforts, and is the value it adds greater than its cost? There is a need to improve and standardize methodology to capture all of the benefits of service and ensure that the formulas used can stand up to scrutiny even from program critics. These methodologies must be developed by professionals, but to the extent that they are user-friendly, programs may be able to incorporate them into their own data collection efforts so that they can demonstrate the unique value of their own program strategies.
- 3) Good process data documents the means by which programs are implemented and is critical to replication. Process data may be gathered by programs as part of meeting compliance requirements, but good documentation should be conducted by an outside evaluator.
- 4) There is a need for large scale, cross-site, long-term and comparative analyses that examine

whether and how service is impacting those involved. What are the effects of service on the server, on the institutions that sponsor service and on the served? If there are long-term impacts, they will not be easy to measure; they will challenge our creativity. This type of data collection and analysis requires significant resources and has the potential to reveal important findings.

THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service has begun a literature review to identify the research that has been done in related fields that may inform service efforts. To what extent has service in the military contributed to life-long habits of giving and volunteering? To what extent has Peace Corps or VISTA participation achieved similar results? What do we know about the long-term impact of participation in school-based service-learning programs on academic achievement or lifelong success? This data collection and analysis falls under the heading of research and requires significant resources to achieve credible results.

There are many different audiences who will have an interest in the data. There is a need for a framework that acknowledges the different audiences and brings coherence to the process so that the same information is collected only once and shared across purposes.

A NOTE OF REALISM

The reality of any program is that the first year is a struggle when many things go wrong; the second year is a year of improvement when some things go right; and the third year is a year of outcomes, when it is possible to describe the impact and the value of the effort. To support community and national service, the nation needs a long-term strategy to assess program progress and impact that takes into account the reality of program development.

CONCLUSION

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service considers private philanthropy to be a vital and necessary partner in the community and national service movement. We believe that the public sector, together with the private, not-for profit and philanthropic sectors, can ensure that service continues as a fundamental American tradition—that programs are well-grounded and administered, that

they are well-executed, and that they are guided by a commitment to partnership, accountability and continuous program improvement.

Service is about applying the nation's resources to achieve ***big citizenship, not big government.***