

# NATIONAL SERVICE IN THE NEXT CENTURY

## TAKING IT TO SCALE

### A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Cleveland, Ohio  
June 3, 1998

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#### **BACKGROUND**

Across the nation, a grassroots movement of community problem-solving through citizen service and civic engagement is developing. Community organizations, schools, youth groups, colleges, universities, professional associations, nonprofits, philanthropy, faith-based organizations, businesses, as well as local and state governments are all part of this effort to address local problems by strengthening the involvement of citizens in their own communities. With a combination of federal, state, local and private support, community service programs have grown slowly yet steadily in recent years, enabling individuals of all ages and backgrounds to participate in a truly transformative process: *giving of themselves to build a better society for all.*

At the federal level, support for community and national service has been growing since the 1990 passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act and the formation of the Points of Light Foundation. These efforts in the early part of the decade led to the founding of the Commission on National and Community Service, a small national service organization established to provide funding to states which would in turn fund a limited number of community service programs. In 1993, the Trust Act was amended and the Corporation for National Service was created to administer AmeriCorps, a model for full- and part-time domestic community service that uses federal funding to stimulate non-federal investment in service opportunities. While the progress of the last decade has often been encouraging and sometimes astonishing, the future of community and national service is not yet secure, and a true national network of support has not yet developed.

#### **TIMING IS EVERYTHING**

We are at an important juncture in the evolution of community and national service programs and opportunities. Existing community and national service programs are struggling to sustain themselves, and the future of many of these programs is uncertain. The continuation, much less the expansion, of these programs will be stymied until and unless the concept of community and national service is fully embraced as a “common expectation of all Americans” and opportunities to serve are made universally available through a combination of government and private funding support. As we approach the new millennium there is a window of opportunity for engaging in a renewed and reinvigorated effort to focus the nation’s attention on the great tradition of service in America and the fundamental value of encouraging service among the nation’s citizens.

## CONTEXT

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service first emerged in 1993 as a group of grantmakers interested or invested in community and national service. These grantmakers met informally to discuss the role of the federal government in promoting service and how best achieve a partnership with government given the availability of new federal resources. Among those involved initially were The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The IBM Foundation, The New York Community Trust, The Surdna Foundation and The James Irvine Foundation. Since its inception, the Grantmaker Forum has believed that service is an ethic fundamental to our nation's history and system of government. The Forum has seen community and national service as a strategy by which communities are better able to solve local problems. These beliefs have led the Grantmaker Forum to conclude that community and national service is deserving of public and private support and thus, the Grantmaker Forum is dedicated to encouraging public/private partnerships in support of a large-scale community and national service effort.

As part of its mission, the Grantmaker Forum organizes and cosponsors local, regional and national conversations and dialogues about the value of citizen service, new approaches to programs and policies, and strategies for promoting and supporting service opportunities. Recognizing the need to develop a strategy for the continued growth of community and national service, the Grantmaker Forum cosponsored a Policy Forum, "***National Service in the Next Century: Taking it to Scale***," at CYZYG '98, City Year's Annual Conference of Idealism, held on June 3, 1998, in Cleveland, Ohio. Joining the Grantmaker Forum in sponsoring the Policy Forum were City Year, the Corporation for National Service, Digital Equipment Corporation, Points of Light Foundation, the Progressive Policy Institute, RPM, Inc., and The Timberland Company. The purpose of the Policy Forum was to provide for the exchange of ideas among leaders from all sectors about the obstacles and opportunities confronting national service and strategies for taking national service "to scale."

## THE POLICY FORUM

The impetus for hosting a Policy Forum during CYZYG '98 was prompted by the national attention that resulted from President Clinton's first ever keynote address to the conference. The President's remarks about community and national service and his leadership in strengthening a national commitment to expanding service opportunities for young people provided a natural opportunity to capitalize on the resources of ideas and practices of those involved in the field of service and volunteerism.

The Policy Forum in Cleveland brought together a wide spectrum of the service community: leaders from local, state, and national service organizations, government, faith-based organizations, business, philanthropy, academia, and the media. After introductory remarks by the moderator, Dr. Rosabeth Moss Kantor, the five panelists, Harris Wofford, CEO of the Corporation for National Service; Nick Bollman, Co-chair of the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service; Sue Donaldson, President of the Seattle City Council; Jeff Swartz, Chief Executive Officer of The Timberland

Company; and Ali Fernandes, an AmeriCorps member serving in City Year, each offered their vision of how and why service should be “scaled up” to allow for broader participation nationally. After their remarks, the discussion opened to include approximately forty invited guests representing all sectors.

## **PURPOSE**

This paper has two purposes: to summarize the issues and topics discussed at the Policy Forum and to provoke continued discussion among a broader community about the best means by which to develop a large scale, multi-sector effort to grow community and national service as we approach the next century. As such, this paper furthers the Grantmaker Forum's purpose of promoting the value of community and national service and encouraging continued support of service by the philanthropic and private sectors.

## **MAIN SPEAKERS**

In her introductory remarks, the moderator, Dr. Rosabeth Moss Kantor, a professor at the Harvard Business School and a member of the National Board of City Year, acknowledged the talent and energy gathered together at the CYZGY conference. Dr. Kantor observed that President Clinton, in his address to the CYZGY conference earlier that day, offered a vision for taking national service to scale. He also offered a first step in doing so by announcing the Promise Fellows initiative, a proposal to create 1000 new leadership positions within AmeriCorps. However, Dr. Kantor cautioned, it is important to consider the challenges and difficulties of achieving the President's vision and taking national service to scale. Dr. Kantor cited a report on national service written by Harris Wofford and Dr. Jacqueline Wexler in 1978 as an example of how long it can take to move a good idea into practice, noting that it took nearly two decades for the Wofford/Wexler concept to materialize in the form of AmeriCorps in the early 1990's. “Twenty years is a long time for ideas to germinate,” stated Dr. Kantor. She suggested that unless the hard realities and challenges are confronted with respect to advancing community and national service, it might well stall for another lengthy period of time.

With that as her focus, Dr. Kantor urged the speakers and the participants not only to offer testimonials about the potential and value of service, because that would not be sufficient to create a large scale national service initiative, but also to consider the following three points in their comments and remarks:

1. How do we create the demand for national service?
2. How do we create (high quality) opportunities to serve?
3. What might be the value of a collective call for action to take national service to scale?

The first speaker, Harris Wofford, CEO of the Corporation for National Service, offered an historical overview. He traced many of the hopes and expectations for national service back to the 1960s when the Peace Corps and Vista were founded. At the time, he reflected, it seemed reasonable to expect that national service would

achieve ubiquity - that it would become the common experience that every American would perform a year of national service. Wofford noted, however, that over the last thirty years those expectations have not yet been realized and at the same time substantial ground has been lost in the struggle to achieve a more equitable and integrated society. "To move forward," Wofford proposed, "we need to unleash the power of creativity in young people and release within them the adventure of leadership." Citing initiatives such as the one announced earlier in the day by President Clinton to create the Promise Fellows initiative, Wofford said it is time for the national service movement to break out of its "adolescence" into a more mature stage of development.

The second speaker, Nick Bollman, Grantmaker Forum Co-chair and founder, offered several compelling reasons for optimism about the future of community and national service in America. Taking the long view, Bollman asserted, "profound social change occurs slowly; it took a hundred years for the idea of universal access to public education to take hold in this country." Bollman went on, "In the sixty years since the founding of the Civilian Conservation Corps, national service has made meaningful and impressive progress...." Bollman reminded the group that national service is *not just another federal program* but rather a grassroots initiative that grows from the human heart and from responding to the needs in our communities. Service programs operate at the community level. "Though they are supported by federal funds and facilitated by the existence of a national infrastructure," Bollman pointed out, "...they are not burdened by a top-heavy bureaucracy which would hinder their effectiveness."

The strengths of national service also create specific challenges for the movement. While service is not a traditional government program, it still derives substantial financial support from federal, local and state government resources. In determining the proper role of government in national service, Bollman urged, we need to take an instrumentalist rather than a moralist approach. A broad political consensus on national service can emerge if we emphasize the ways in which government can leverage local, state, and national service efforts. A similar perspective must be brought to bear on accountability. Bollman added, "By setting clear goals for service, and by holding ourselves accountable for outcomes, we can demonstrate (to others who may be skeptical) the effectiveness of service in addressing community problems and engaging citizens constructively in problem-solving efforts."

Sue Donaldson, President of the Seattle City Council, described the opportunity that the approaching millennium presents in her city's attempt to galvanize its service movement. When she joined the Seattle City Council in 1990 she wanted to create a domestic Peace Corps for the city. Those ambitions led to the creation of the Youth Involvement Network. To build on this achievement, Donaldson suggested to the Mayor that Seattle's celebration of the new millennium include the recognition and further development of community service programs. Her recommendation resulted in the establishment of the **Seattle Service Corps 2000**; an effort that will include everyone in the city who is involved in community and national service. Citizens of all ages will be invited to make a commitment for the year as a symbol of their larger commitment to service in the new millennium. In return, each individual will receive special patches that will make visible the growing and integral role of service in Seattle's civic life.

The special patches being used to celebrate and commemorate Seattle's service movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century represent a form of visibility that is known as "branding." Jeff Swartz, Chief Executive Officer of the Timberland Company and Chairman of City Year's National Board of Trustees, championed the notion and value of branding. "By branding community service initiatives, the market sector has an opportunity to advance its corporate image at the same time that it advances its financial interest and the interest of the service program," stated Swartz. For example, City Year participants are outfitted by Timberland. This branding has not only given visibility and credibility to Timberland as a good corporate citizen but has also provided City Year with a trademark style and an identity.

Swartz explained that part of what private enterprise could teach the service movement is the importance of branding in the effort to take national service to scale. Branding makes the excellence, reliability, cost-effectiveness, and replicability of an idea or product visible to the public. Swartz asserted that with help from private sector leaders and entrepreneurs, community and national service has an opportunity to adopt a branding strategy that would advance its value and ultimately, its viability in the next century.

The final speaker was Ali Fernandes, an AmeriCorps member serving in City Year. While other speakers had referred to the value of service to communities, Fernandes spoke from the perspective of one who serves. Ali powerfully evoked the ways in which his life had been transformed by his participation in service. A high school dropout, Ali earned his GED as a result of his service activity. In his service work as a tutor at an elementary school and visitor to youth detention centers, he has seen the "ripple effect" of his own service. "Young people want the chance to improve their own lives," he stated. His experience helps demonstrate to others that positive transformation is possible. However, he identified what he considers to be a key problem – that there are simply too few service opportunities for all who should serve.

## **DISCUSSION**

Following the remarks of the panelists, Dr. Kantor opened the conversation to all the participants. Two issues were proposed as organizing points for discussion:

1. How do we generate demand for national service?
2. How do we build the "supply" of quality service opportunities?

Without summarizing every point made during the open discussion, it is possible to trace several central points brought up by participants. The first set of comments related to the issue of demand, and generating young people's involvement in service activities. Steve Culbertson, CEO of Youth Service America, stated, "We know why young people become involved in service. Their participation is the result of being asked by school programs, youth organizations, or even by individual adults to perform service. Young people do not spontaneously gravitate toward service." The implication of Culbertson's remarks is that service needs an effective outreach/recruitment strategy

that speaks to its target audience. The needs and interests of young people must be addressed by such outreach. ***To make a commitment to service, young people must feel that the effort is relevant and valuable to them as individuals.***

Hubie Jones from the University of Massachusetts at Boston asserted that if national service is to become a movement and if it is to be taken to scale then it must include the voices of young people. Jones argued that if young people are expected to serve, they must be involved in planning for the growth of national service as a movement. "If young people aren't involved," Jones explained, "then all that can be expected is a set of wonderful, important activities for individuals that will do nothing to move this country where it needs to go."

Dr. Linda Forsyth, Executive Director of the California Commission on Improving Life Through Service, followed these observations with her own thoughts about specific strategies for generating demand for national service. She said, "With a strong economy it is increasingly difficult to get people to commit to a full year of service." Dr. Forsyth suggested the need to increase funding for service, making it more attractive economically, and to decrease the number of obstacles for those performing service. One way to do that would be to embed service within schools, thus raising the visibility of, and expectations around, service. Another way to make service attractive to young people is to create a form of credentialing, giving young people credit and recognition for the service they perform, a move for which there is growing support.

Maria Hernandez Ferrier, Executive Director of City Year in San Antonio, suggested that part of the educational effort should be aimed at political and civic leaders, demonstrating that young people are not clients but rather they are crucial resources. Young people are not the problem, but they can be part of a solution. "Service leaders must be included at the table as our communities confront their ills," she said.

Will Marshall of the Progressive Policy Institute argued that service leaders must make clear, with hard quantitative evidence, the benefits of service to society, to needy people, and to needy communities rather than focusing on the benefits received by those who serve. He added, "There will be powerful derivative benefits to the servers if they do work of real value." Marshall concluded by suggesting that communities would finance large numbers of volunteers if they believed that those volunteers were adding true value to the community.

A number of participants observed that a large-scale community and national service initiative needs an infrastructure that can support and ensure quality programs.

Some participants focused on the need for private funding to support risk-taking and innovation in community and national service, since under the best of circumstances public funds are not likely to be used for those purposes. During this discussion, the issue of the private sector's interest in branding and thereby supporting service programs surfaced again. Ed Cohen, President of Carlin Ventures, Inc. and former City Year National Board Member, suggested that branding provides volunteers a real sense of belonging to a larger, exciting enterprise. Mr. Cohen remarked that

AmeriCorps had not sufficiently developed its own brand and offered City Year as a successful model of branding. He concluded, "We should be strategic in creating brand recognition within cities or a limited geographic space with which younger people can identify."

When the discussion turned to the issue of "supply" or creating opportunities to serve, several different concerns emerged. Participants reiterated the need for financial support, noting that funding needs to come from the private as well the public sector or from innovative partnerships of the two. Jeff Swartz suggested that branding service programs would provide for a level of competition, whereby service brands would compete with each other in a "parallel marketplace" for private funding. To create such a marketplace, service programs need to present not as consumers but as creators of wealth. Turning a child's life around or creating self-esteem is a "product" that can be marketed to private sector investors.

Jonathan Alter, a Newsweek and NBC News journalist, noted that there are government resources available to apply to service but that service needs to be more clearly defined as a problem-solving strategy. He described how America's Promise, under the leadership of General Colin Powell, has focused the nation's attention on the "fifteen million children at risk" in this country. If service is a strategy for meeting the needs of even some of those fifteen million children, then it is a national problem-solving strategy deserving of significant government and private investment.

Another point raised during this part of the discussion harkened back to Nick Bollman's opening remarks about accountability. There is a need to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of service. There needs to be systematic collection and dissemination of data that makes the case for continued investment in service programs. To be taken seriously service programs must be accountable for results. Service is seen as "something for everybody." It is described as a strategy for supporting youth development and as a way of bridging racial, economic, and geographic divides, but where is the evidence to support these claims?

Participants identified strategies for generating more service opportunities. Harris Wofford stated that youth service and faith-based organizations have critical and often overlooked roles to play in providing service opportunities. Jonathan Alter suggested that enormous gains would be made quickly if college work-study programs were converted to service-study programs instead. What would be involved in such a large-scale conversion? How would the functions that are currently supported by work-study dollars be accomplished and what new community-based efforts might be pursued by young people engaged in "service-study" rather than work-study? Participants noted that while congressional enthusiasm for national service is lukewarm, bipartisan support for service exists at the state level and needs to be further cultivated. Finally, Don Baer, former White House advisor, urged the participants not to overlook the importance of the civic value of service. The marketplace within which service operates is not simply one that satisfies the desires and needs of individual consumers; it is one that is also generated by the needs of the nation. Part of what the nation must do is instill in its citizens a sense of civic responsibility and duty. The nation

needs leaders who are willing to say, "*of those to whom much is given, much is required.*"

## **CONCLUSION**

The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service is committed to continuing the discussion that began in Cleveland, Ohio. The Cleveland Policy Forum demonstrated that the public and private sectors have different, yet closely related and overlapping, roles to play in taking national service to scale.

In reaching its next level of maturity, community and national service faces both challenges and opportunities. While funding remains a vital need, more than money is required to promote the concepts and the embedded values of citizen service and volunteerism. A vibrant network of community and national service opportunities will require the skills, techniques, leadership and commitment of the private and philanthropic sectors. Such a network will also need the commitment, support, and active leadership of the public and nonprofit sectors. Leadership and authority; private wealth and public funds  $\approx$  the Cleveland conversation proved that community and national service cannot afford to neglect either side of this equation.

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