

SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE PUBLIC POLICY TASK FORCE

A Report to the Members of the Grantmaker Forum

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Topic: Are Our Principles Making a Difference?

In April 1997, the Grantmaker Forum issued a paper titled, *Statement of Principles: Service as a National Movement NOT Just Another Federal Program*. As you know, that document presents the philanthropic perspective on community and national service, and the critical roles played by the public, private and philanthropic sectors in support of a vibrant national service program. Now, with Congress considering the future of community and national service in America, the Grantmaker Forum's Public Policy Task Force asked staff to identify how the principles adopted one year ago align with the pending proposals. This document — a summary of the findings — has been prepared and provided as a service to the members of the Grantmaker Forum. The Forum's core Principles are outlined in italics.

□ ***Ensure Opportunity for All Those Who Wish to Serve***

A community and national service program is at its best when it provides opportunities for all Americans to serve, regardless of age, background, educational achievement or wealth.

The National Community and Service Amendments Act of 1998 would:

- **Foster broad-based participation.** As proposed, the legislation continues the practice of providing stipends that enable people of all economic backgrounds to serve, and expands educational-awards-only to encourage diversity among those who serve.

- **Make it easier for older Americans to contribute.** The proposed legislation broadens the age and income guidelines for National Senior Service Corps participants, expanding the pool of older Americans who can perform results-oriented service in their communities.

■ **Provide volunteers access to a wide range of federal education assistance.**

As proposed, the Act ensures that volunteers receiving education awards are still eligible for other federal student aid needed to pay for college.

□ ***Nourish Local Initiatives to Build National Strength***

Each community knows best its needs and resources. A national service program should strive to inspire local communities with a sense of national purpose, while giving local leaders the flexibility and authority to shape their own efforts and strategies.

The National Community and Service Amendments Act of 1998 would:

- **Assure that every state is treated equally.** The proposed legislation assures that each state is eligible for \$500,000 in formula grants to support national and community service initiatives.

- **Build partnerships with state governments.** As proposed, the legislation allows the Corporation for National Service to enter into agreements with governors to better coordinate and deliver national service programs in each state.

- ***Foster Partnerships Among Private, Public, Philanthropic and Nonprofit Sectors***
A vibrant citizen service program maximizes the resources of all sectors of society – the private, public, philanthropic and nonprofits. A national service program should encourage innovative partnerships that build on each sector’s strengths.

The National Community and Service Amendments Act of 1998 would:

- **Extend funding to the Points of Light Foundation through the year 2002.** As proposed, the legislation reauthorizes appropriations to the Foundation for the next five years, a move that would strengthen a partner that has proved vital in forging links among foundations, nonprofits and others.
- **Encourage non-AmeriCorps volunteers to contribute to their communities.** AmeriCorps members serve as a catalyst for others in the community to contribute unpaid time to meet local needs. Currently, each AmeriCorps volunteer generates, on average, approximately 12 unpaid volunteers. Under the proposed legislation, AmeriCorps members are to place an even higher priority on recruiting, training and supervising unpaid volunteers.

- ***Share Lessons Learned Among Service Providers***
An effective national service program encourages and enables local programs to set standards and assess efforts. It then shares the lessons learned with others tackling similar problems in communities across America.

The National Community and Service Amendments Act of 1998 would:

- **Broaden authority to support the coordination of national service programs.** This change, as proposed, also increases flexibility in providing technical assistance and training to national service programs.
- **Encourage programs targeting improved effectiveness.** As proposed, federal dollars could be used to support multi-state, demonstration and other programs carried out to improve or expand service-learning initiatives.

- ***Build Long-Term Capacity in People and Programs***
An effective national service program should nurture long-term solutions, building the capacity in people and organizations to ensure local programs remain viable and effective catalysts for meeting community needs.

The National Community and Service Amendments Act of 1998 would:

- **Strengthen the State Commissions that support community and national service efforts in each state.** As proposed, the minimum grant for State Commission administration increases from \$125,000 to \$200,000. This increase should strengthen the Commissions, making it easier for them to play a key role in shaping state priorities and helping local partnerships leverage funds and strengthen programs. A similar change is proposed for Learn and Serve America.
- **Focus AmeriCorps*VISTA on sustainable activities.** As proposed, AmeriCorps*VISTA is to place top priority on supporting and promoting sustainable activities in communities, a change that strengthens the long-term impact of locally driven efforts.

Looking Towards the Future

The Grantmaker Forum lauds the progress that has been made in the development of a broad-based community and national service program. There continue to be areas, however, where the Grantmaker Forum's Public Policy Task Force believes attention is needed to ensure that the program is of the highest quality and that our goals for the server and the served are accomplished. To that end, the Task Force encourages continued emphasis on the following:

— ***Increasing Quality:***

Since 1990, the nation has benefited from new federal initiatives designed to expand opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to serve. Now is the time to tackle the next challenge: establishing standards to better define what constitutes a quality service experience. The expansion of service opportunities must be coupled with an assurance that programs are of the highest quality and deliver the best possible experience to program participants and service recipients. The Grantmaker Forum stands ready to work with the Corporation for National Service and other government and nonprofit organizations to address this challenge. We support the development of guidelines for community and national service that maximize the impact and value to the server and the served. Such guidelines, of course, must be flexible enough to allow for local creativity and variations among communities.

— ***Evaluating Program Impact:***

Addressing standards is the first step in sharpening program quality. The second is evaluation. The Grantmaker Forum continues to believe that we need to make significant strides in our ability to measure the impact and effectiveness of the various streams of service. We need to establish and disseminate formal models to ensure that service programs are adhering to quality standards and achieving desired goals. The Grantmaker Forum has begun to work on this challenge. In the spring of 1998, the Grantmaker Forum is commissioning an inventory of all research and evaluation that has been performed on community and national service since 1990. The goal will be to develop a comprehensive and cohesive research framework — for each stream of service — to better identify ways to evaluate program effectiveness and impact. We encourage community and national service

programs to include program evaluation and standard-setting into the instruments they now use to track program accountability.

— ***Valuing Member Development:***

Our tendency in recent years has been to emphasize the value of service to the community and perhaps under-value how the experience contributes to the development of the server. The Grantmaker Forum does believe that the financial investment in service has a short-term pay-off in benefits that accrue to the community served. But we also believe there are longer-term pay-offs. Performing service not only provides young people with valuable skills, but it instills a sense of civic pride and personal responsibility. Youth engaged in service see firsthand the difference they can make. They learn the value of mutual responsibility and develop a lifelong commitment to giving. The Grantmaker Forum encourages the Corporation for National Service and policy makers to recognize and value service's twin goals: strengthening and improving communities, and cultivating civic engagement and personal responsibility.

— ***Supporting Host Organizations:***

Initial studies and reports from the field indicate that successful volunteer programs invest heavily in training, support and supervision of volunteers, both paid and unpaid. All organizations — large and small, private and public — need to recognize the importance of having a structure and system that supports volunteers. As well, they must recognize the costs associated with running volunteer programs. It is equally important that funders provide the resources needed to operate an effective volunteer program. The Grantmaker Forum encourages organizations and funders to identify and plan for the real costs associated with developing and maintaining a high quality volunteer experience.

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