



Preface

The ServiceNation Policy Agenda was developed through an open process that included more than 100 organizations representing millions of Americans. A core working-group of 40 volunteers, representing the entire political spectrum and many decades of experience in developing national, state and local policies on service, worked together over nine months to shape this agenda into a broad vision for taking service to scale in America by 2020 and releasing citizen energy and idealism to help solve our most pressing challenges. The agenda was then further informed by dialogue in numerous national conferences in Atlanta, Minneapolis, Williamsburg and other locations around America, and by discussions with leaders in the Congress, in Statehouses, and in communities across the country. The agenda represents a comprehensive and long-term vision for how service can help transform our country, but it is also a work in progress. The agenda is not a conclusive list; rather, it is a collection of our coalition’s best suggestions for how to grow and strengthen service opportunities for Americans at every life stage. We could not capture every policy recommendation through this process, and we recognize that there are many other wonderful ideas for how to deepen and utilize citizen service to address America’s challenges. This is the beginning of an effort to strengthen and expand service opportunities in America, not the end. We invite more voices into this discussion in the coming year and will engage in formal and informal conferences and forums and days of action to ensure those voices are heard. We will continue to welcome improvements to and endorsements of this agenda in the future. We hope that the ServiceNation Policy Agenda will spark a broader conversation about the role of service in America, and we encourage those who believe in citizen service to join our coalition and work toward the day when meaningful opportunities for every American—from early childhood through the retired years—are both a common expectation and common experience.

Introduction

In 2006, TIME Magazine named You the Person of the Year for creating change with “community and collaboration on a scale never seen before.” In every sector of American life, citizens are driving change. On the Web, citizens are using Facebook, MySpace, Wikipedia, and YouTube to redefine how we connect with one another. In business, citizen entrepreneurs are using market expertise and technology to improve our world. In the nonprofit sector, social entrepreneurs are bringing innovative strategies to bear on pressing social issues. In politics, citizens are mobilizing in record numbers, turning conventional campaign strategies upside down. Everywhere we look, citizens are at the heart of path-breaking change.

Despite this citizen-inspired progress, many challenges remain. Every 29 seconds another student gives up on school, resulting in more than one million American high school students who drop out every year. Current U.S. energy consumption patterns are unsustainable, with both economic and environmental implications. In Africa, more than one million people, mostly children under the age of five, needlessly die every year from preventable and treatable malaria. Meanwhile, almost one in eight Americans lives in poverty in the wealthiest nation on Earth. Conventional strategies are not addressing these systemic problems. Citizens have a comparative advantage to address these and other critical challenges.

It is time to call on our country’s most valuable resource—its people—to mobilize against our most difficult challenges.

Our Vision

We envision a nation in which citizen service is a central strategy in addressing America's most pressing needs in education, the environment, public health, fighting poverty, disaster relief, and in sharing American ideals and idealism with the rest of the world. To do this we propose a new agenda for citizen service in which there are meaningful opportunities for service at every key life stage, and for every socioeconomic group, from kindergarten through the post-retirement years with an opportunity for full-time national service as a rite of passage between the ages of 18-28, as a centerpiece of this new approach. This agenda represents a long-term vision—leading up to the year 2020—that describes a whole new approach to citizen service in America.

We envision young people volunteering in grade school as part of a service-learning curriculum designed to engage students in their communities. Service-learning will continue on college campuses as students choose from an array of service options. Young people might also—before or after college—choose to do a year or more of full-time service in a new Serve America Program, AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, or Armed Forces. And full-time service will become an even more powerful pathway to reconnect out-of-school youth to education, careers, and civic engagement.

We envision enhanced opportunities for citizens to make careers in the public and nonprofit sectors as well as expanded pro bono opportunities for private sector employees to share their special and technical skills and expertise.

We envision a commitment to service by the Baby Boomer generation as they complete their first careers and embark on second careers, full-time service assignments, or traditional volunteering, to improve their communities, country and world.

With service opportunities stretching from pre-kindergarten through retirement, and available for every socio-economic group, Americans will be able to serve in multiple capacities throughout their lives – ranging from traditional to stipended volunteer service; from full-time to part-time national service; and from domestic to international service.

By engaging citizens in a lifetime of service, we will make service a defining ethic of what it means to be an American. Citizens will be confronted with a commonly-asked question: “Where do you do your service?” Service will be a civic right of passage freely undertaken by all Americans. And the results will be profound.

Our Plan

ServiceNation—a growing coalition of more than 100 national organizations that reach 100 million Americans—has developed an ambitious and powerful policy agenda for bringing service to scale. We leverage existing programs to maximize impact and suggest the implementation of new initiatives to create greater opportunities for Americans to serve at all life stages. Below is an Executive Summary followed by the ten-point agenda. For each agenda item we discuss our proposal, rationale, and implementation strategy.

Executive Summary

“It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system, that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a free Government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even of his personal services to the defense of it.” – George Washington

The following proposals provide varied opportunities, beginning in kindergarten and lasting through retirement, for citizens to work on solutions to society’s problems. These proposals will help instill a culture of service at an early age and provide opportunities for Americans to continue serving throughout their lifetimes. To empower Americans through service, we propose the following:

- ✓ **Engage 100 million Americans in community volunteering** by building the capacity of nonprofit, faith-based, and civic organizations to recruit, train, and utilize volunteers. And by founding a new Serve America Campaign to inspire more Americans to lead through service.
- ✓ **Engage 20 million youth per year in school and community-based service-learning, making service-learning a universal experience** by integrating community service with intentional learning opportunities to engage students in school, increase academic achievement, support positive development, and to teach civic responsibility. Critical to this is Summer of Service, which will teach civic participation and channel the idealism of young people into service for their communities.
- ✓ **Expand service on college campuses** by establishing a civilian service counterpart to the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and providing incentives to colleges and universities that engage more students in service.
- ✓ **Place 1 million Americans per year by 2020 in full- and part-time stipended national service** through a new Serve America Program, which will leverage millions of traditional volunteers, to improve education, conserve the environment, increase energy efficiency and build the green economy, address poverty, strengthen health and wellness, and enhance disaster relief. A key component of these new efforts will be a national service Reserve Corps to be unleashed in times of pressing need. The Serve America Program will also award fellowships to leverage the ability of Americans to serve full- or part-time in faith-based and community organizations.
- ✓ **Launch a Veterans Service Fellowship** as part of a new Serve America Fellowship program that draws on the unique leadership and experience of veterans as they engage in sustained volunteer service domestically in nonprofit and faith-based groups.
- ✓ **Attract talent to America’s public sector** by establishing a U.S. Public Service Academy and a graduate level civilian ROTC program to attract the country’s best and brightest to federal service.
- ✓ **Forge alliances of peace and prosperity through overseas service** by expanding the Peace Corps, engaging highly-skilled Americans to meet urgent needs as Volunteers for Prosperity, and enhancing the ability of Americans to partner with nongovernmental organizations as Global Service Fellows.
- ✓ **Foster new innovations and growth to scale in the nonprofit sector** by creating a new Community Solutions Fund Network and a Commission on Cross-Sector Solutions to leverage federal dollars to identify new solutions, foster and scale what works, and provide greater capital for the nonprofit market.
- ✓ **Provide millions of Americans age 50 and older opportunities to use their lifetime of learning and skills to help address America’s challenges** by expanding opportunities for volunteer service and facilitating a transition to greater engagement in civic life.
- ✓ **Measure outcomes of expanded service opportunities** with online rating systems and meaningful localized census data on volunteering rates and other indicators of civic health.