

## **Statement from United Way Worldwide For the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service**

**July 2019**

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National and community service is a core American value, and national service programs create volunteer opportunities for Americans, which expands the reach and capacity for nonprofit organizations to strengthen local communities. To that end, we support the mission and goals of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service.

### **United Way and the Importance of National Service Programs**

United Way mobilizes the caring power and resources of nearly 1,800 local communities across the United States, and in 40 countries and territories across the globe. Together, we fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community. United Way envisions a world where all individuals and families achieve their human potential through education, income stability, and healthy lives. That vision is possible when people give generously of their time, talent and treasure to create lasting solutions that improve life for everyone.

For decades, hundreds of United Ways have partnered with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) in small towns and big cities to make America safer, smarter and healthier. United Ways across the United States depend on national service programs, such as RSVP, SeniorCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA, to provide critical programming support in their work with low-income individuals, children and veterans. National service programs enable local United Ways and other nonprofits to leverage additional external revenue of up to \$1.3 billion nationally.<sup>1</sup>

National service programs help young leaders develop skills and find jobs. A study by CNCS shows that unemployed individuals who volunteer are 27 percent more likely to secure full-time employment.<sup>2</sup> This relationship proves even more significant for volunteers without high school diplomas and for those who live in rural communities.

Additionally, national service programs help stimulate more broad-based economic growth by helping address the unmet needs of economically disadvantaged individuals through improved financial literacy, access to affordable housing, provision of job skills training and support to programming that enables at-risk youth to achieve success in school and prevent them from dropping out.

### **Key Recommendations**

To support the mission of the Commission and to further our goals to promote national service, United Way recommends these policy priorities:

- **Expand Program Funding for AmeriCorps and other National Service Programs**

Funding for our national service programs should be increased. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve American Act of 2009 instructed the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to expand AmeriCorps members to 250,000 by 2017, but still only 75,000 members serve each year, due solely to lack of funding. Americans are eager to serve, and we need to provide the resources to give all those who wish to serve the opportunity to do so. This investment in service opportunities will strengthen our communities and develop the next generation of American leaders.

- **Institute Tax-free Education Awards**

Continue to offer and expand national service education awards but make them tax-free. National service members do important work in communities at minimal wages, and taxing education awards for their service

only adds additional burdens for individuals, which may become a barrier to service. Tax-free education awards increase the amount of funding that can be applied to higher learning, provide an incentive to serve, and these awards align with similar purposed federal fellowship and scholarship programs. We urge Congress to pass the Bennet Isakson Tax Relief Act.

- **Expand Employer Sponsors of National Service**

United Way Worldwide is a charter member of the Employers of National Service Program, as are many of our private, public, and nonprofit partners. These organizations recognize the value national service programs hold, not only in local economies, but in developing a robust future workforce. National service programs help Americans learn valuable job skills, gain experience and enhance essential skills that make alumni high-quality employees for any organization or company. United Way believes that expanding employer sponsors of national service is a crucial strategy to tackle community challenges and increase the employability and earning potential of national service alumni over the course of their careers.

- **Increase Awareness of National Service Opportunities and Provide Alternatives to Keep People Engaged**

There are many Americans who would like to serve, but they may not be qualified for military service, or they may face barriers to participate in other national service programs. Expanding awareness of service opportunities could be an effective strategy to encourage increased numbers of individuals to serve their country in military, national, and public service.<sup>3</sup> More should also be done to direct Americans who express an interest to serve, but who are unable to do so to volunteer opportunities that match their skills, interests, qualifications and availability.

- **Promote Safe, Affordable Housing Strategies for Service Members**

Developing strategies to promote safe, affordable housing solutions for national service members would remove a major obstacle from national service. Federal housing vouchers, public-private partnerships for affordable housing and host family programs, similar to strategies employed by student exchange programs, are examples of ways to address this issue. Providing housing accommodations for the duration of a national service term would deepen community connections, the understanding of local cultures and customs, stimulate economic growth, and make service more accessible to people from low-income communities.

## **Conclusion**

National service is crucial to the health and well-being of local communities, and it promotes a future workforce that is robust and highly skilled. Continued support for the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service and all national service programs should be a priority for Congress, and we urge the adoption of these recommendations to further the impact of national service on local communities and strengthen the future of our country.

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<sup>1</sup> The Aspen Institute, Franklin Project (2013). *The Economic Value of National Service*. [http://voicesforservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Sep19\\_Econ\\_Value\\_National\\_Service-2.pdf](http://voicesforservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Sep19_Econ_Value_National_Service-2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Spera, C.; Ghertner, R., Nerino, A., DiTommaso, A. (2013). Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work? Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation. [https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment\\_research\\_report.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Marc Magee, From Selective Service to National Service: A Blueprint for Citizenship and Security in the 21st Century (Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute, July 2003).