



# Service-Learning United

## United in Our Support of Service-Learning

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### Suggested Service-Learning Tips and Talking Points for the Kennedy Serve America Act Listening Tour *Updated May 12, 2009*

The Corporation for National and Community Service has asked the field to respond to a series of questions regarding how it can move forward in implementing the Kennedy Serve America Act.

### Let's make sure service-learning supporters are SEEN AND HEARD

**Step 1. Register to Attend.** Below is the schedule of the upcoming meetings:

<b>May 13, 2009</b>	Springfield, MO	1:00 - 4:00pm (local)
<b>May 14, 2009</b>	Columbia, SC	1:00 - 4:00pm (local)
<b>May 20, 2009</b>	Washington, DC*	12:30 - 2:30pm (local)
<b>May 22, 2009</b>	Boston, MA	9:00am - 12:00pm (local)
<b>May 27, 2009</b>	Salt Lake City, UT	9:00am - 12:00pm (local)
<b>May 28, 2009</b>	New Orleans, LA	1:00 - 4:00pm (local)

You can register here: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serveamerica/index.asp>

**Step 2. Let Us Know You're Attending.** Once you register, let us know what session you plan to attend. We want to make sure service-learning supporters can connect to amplify our voice and collective priorities. We'll also make sure you have updated talking points and materials to help you communicate our message effectively.

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qB3M6ycnBad7\\_2fdje8F19bA\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qB3M6ycnBad7_2fdje8F19bA_3d_3d)

**Step 3. Prepare to Speak Up for Service-Learning.** Here are tips to effectively speak up for service-learning at these sessions:

- Arrive on time, if not early.
- At the sessions you will sign up to speak on a "first come first served" basis.
- Each speaker gets 3 minutes and it goes until the 3 hours is up.
- The "flow" of the sessions corresponds to whoever signs up. With that in mind service-learning spokespeople in attendance should diverse themselves so service-learning issues are mentioned throughout.
- Use the suggested talking points on the pages that follow to help communicate the collective priorities and concerns of the service-learning community.

Please spread the word to your networks and constituents. Service-learning talking points and supporting materials for the Serve America Listening Tour will be available on [www.servicelearningunited.org](http://www.servicelearningunited.org) and [www.service-learning.blogspot.com](http://www.service-learning.blogspot.com).



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### SERVICE-LEARNING SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS AND TIPS

We do know the sessions will be organized around five topical areas:

1. Achieving Growth through Simpler Grantmaking
2. Combining Assets for Greater Impact
3. Demonstrating Impact
4. Expanding Opportunities to Serve
5. Spurring Innovation and Supporting the Nonprofit Sector

Within each of these topical areas, the Corporation asked several questions to which they hope the field would respond. We have a first draft of suggested talking points for service-learning supporters planning to attend/participate in these meetings. Many thanks to Vince Meldrum for taking the first run at developing responses.

You can access the questions and the draft responses at: <http://lsarequests.wikispaces.com/>  
Use the sidebar to navigate between the different topical areas. The text is also on the following pages for your convenience, but we ask that you make your edits using the web-based Wiki.

Please feel free to add your thoughts and edit the responses. Again, this is a working draft and is the beginning of our field-wide conversation. We will update the document on a daily basis and provide them to service-learning practitioners attending upcoming listening tour sessions.

What follows are suggested talking points or responses for service-learning practitioners attending a listening session. Updated versions of the talking points will also be available at [www.servicelearningunited.org](http://www.servicelearningunited.org) and [www.service-learning.blogspot.com](http://www.service-learning.blogspot.com).

## COMBINING ASSETS FOR GREATER IMPACT

### ***How can CNCS and its programs capitalize on the diversity of our programs while also coordinating efforts creatively and effectively for maximum impact?***

According to some figures, up to 50% of all AmeriCorps members are working in schools across the country. In a number of those cases AmeriCorps members are working in schools where Learn and Serve America grantees are training educators to use service-learning in the classroom. But it has been incredibly hard to coordinate the work of these two groups. A couple of steps CNCS could take to alleviate this problem:

1. The Education Corps should have a special emphasis on placing AmeriCorps members in schools as service-learning coordinators. To ensure that we combine the power of service-learning with the power of AmeriCorps organizations receiving these grants should be required to demonstrate that they are actively working to institutionalize service-learning into the curriculum and culture of the school districts or are working in partnership with school/district officials and organizations that are leading such efforts.
2. When placing AmeriCorps members State Commissions should be required to coordinate their work with the K-12 School-Based Learn and Serve Program Director in their state. In most cases there are Learn and Serve program directors are located within the state education agency and could serve a valuable role in identify opportunities to strengthen the experience of AmeriCorps members working in schools, helping to identify schools where corps members could have the broadest impact on the student population and providing training to corps members interested in using service-learning in the classroom.

Set aside funds for service-learning professionals to train AmeriCorps members. Many organizations hosting AmeriCorps members have expressed interest in having those members work directly with young people using a service-learning model. Service-learning organizations across the country are positioned to ensure that those programs have the maximum impact. While service-learning conceptually is simple, to maximize its impact practitioners need to meet certain standards. The service-learning field has spent considerable time and energy developing a network of trainers who could meet this need if called upon.

### ***How can the Corporation stimulate new partnerships, both within the government sector and with businesses and foundations, to combine our assets for greater impact?***

Reach out to the Department of Education to develop structures to support service-learning. Secretary Duncan has indicated a strong interest in the use of service-learning in America's schools, but has a number of pressing issues on his plate. CNCS should reach out to the Department of Education to co-develop programs that will stimulate the use of service-learning in schools and meet the need to improve academic performance. In particular, service-learning could become a preferred strategy under Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, currently commonly referred to as *No Child Left Behind*) and service-learning could play a vital role in the teacher professional development needs outlined in Title II of ESEA.

## **DEMONSTRATING IMPACT**

### ***In what ways can service produce the greatest impact?***

Through service-learning, young people can become better students, effective civic actors, and more interested in making a life-long commitment to their communities.

Service-learning is also an incredibly cost-efficient program, with \$4 private dollars leveraged for every federal dollar invested. At a cost of roughly \$40 per student service-learning is building academic skills while creating a generation of young people with the skills, desire and motivation to solve the worst problems facing their communities

### ***How do we better demonstrate impact, and as we move to more standardized performance measures, how do we preserve the diversity of programs and localized nature of solutions?***

When attempting to create standardized performance measures, it is important to keep in mind that not all approaches are the same. In particular, service-learning is very different than AmeriCorps programs. To some extent, the impact of service-learning projects can be measured in terms of the miles of trails improved, the number of homes built, or the number of young people that are mentored--but this focus on output goals misses the comprehensive or primary impact and benefits of service-learning. Rather than only focusing on output goals in terms of community change, CNCS should focus on two levels of impact:

1) is the service-learning project positively affecting the participants? This can be measured through a variety of measurements that range from academic performance to civic engagement; and  
2) is service-learning becoming an integral part of the school and/or host organization(s) where it takes place? Service-learning is a means of working with young people not a stand alone program that operates in isolation. An important sign of that success is whether or not service-learning is integrated into classrooms, youth programs and organizational culture. Research consistently shows that when service-learning reaches the level of deep integration into the structure and culture the impact on young people is significant.

### ***What is the best way to identify program models that work?***

### ***How should the Corporation transition from the current practice of self-nominated performance measures in AmeriCorps to standardized measures?***

***For example, the Act sets forth standard measures for each of the five Service Corps. In education, the legislation includes performance measures such as: Student engagement, student attendance, student behavior, and student academic achievement. What support do grantees need to implement these new measures?***

Grantees should be incentivized or required to work with the K-12 School-Based Learn and Serve America program staff to develop and monitor these measures. In many cases, service-learning sites have already established performance measures that address these areas.

### ***Should the Corporation establish standard national performance measures in VISTA, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve? If so, how?***

### ***Should there be a few measures that apply to all Corporation programs?***

No. Service-learning programs are sufficiently distinct as to require distinct performance measurements.

## **EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE**

### ***How can CNCS and its partners attract people of all ages to serve?***

One simple step CNCS could take is to expand the funding and reach of Learn and Serve America. While Learn and Serve represents CNCS's largest program in terms of participants, engaging over 1.3 million young people each year, it receives less than 4% of CNCS's total budget.

Service already appeals to young people. Polls consistently show that young people see a need to volunteer and help their community. But, at the same time polls show that young people don't see themselves as playing a role in local governance or understanding the role local government plays in solving problems. Service-learning adds a sense of civic commitment to young people's enthusiasm for community work.

CNCS can increase its efforts to engage schools as providers of service-learning and not just recipients of volunteers and services. A stronger connection to school-based programs will increase the number of young people engaged in service. A majority of our nation's youth still attend school. One way to increase the number of K-12 age young people engaged in service is by working with and through schools. Service-learning is the most effective way to reach and engage the greatest number of classroom teachers who can provide a gateway to K-12 student involvement in service and civic engagement. And in this process, community-based partners who often support or collaborate with educators to provide service-learning experiences, must play a key role in this process and also receive resources and support to make this happen.

### ***How should the Corporation and its partners identify and nurture new programs that can host additional AmeriCorps slots?***

CNCS must explore how to identify and nurture new sites to expand ALL of its programs--not just potential hosts for AmeriCorps programs. In addition to identifying and nurturing programs that can host AmeriCorps members, CNCS must ask how it can identify and nurture programs that can increase the reach of service-learning. Numerous youth organizations are interested in adding service-learning to their programs, but they do not have the training they would need to provide high quality service-learning. The Corporation currently has no means to reach and train those organizations. Setting aside a portion of its PDAT funds to support the expansion of service-learning creates a foundation from which CNCS can engage hundreds of thousands of young people currently out of its reach.

### ***What are some promising approaches to promoting more service programs focused on education, healthy futures, clean energy, veterans and economic opportunity?***

Education: Through Learn and Serve America CNCS has invested 15 years into developing a network of schools and school districts where service-learning is a core feature of its curriculum and culture. These schools and the community-based organizations working with them provide the best opportunity to place AmeriCorps members into schools where the relationship can be mutually beneficial. The AmeriCorps member would be placed into an environment that has been prepared for their participation, where a professional development program is already in place and where their work can be supported by community based organizations that are already engaged in promoting service learning. CNCS should target community based organizations working in schools to promote service-learning to expand this program.

Education: Invest in systemic models of school-based service-learning, where school and community-based partners design an initiative to address educational performance measures (i.e., student achievement, attendance rates, retention) and commit to engaging a critical mass of student participants, particularly those at risk of under-performing or dropping out of school.

Clean Energy: Invest in or place a priority programs that engage K-12 and college age youth in service-learning experiences in which they can utilize promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) knowledge and skills to create clean energy solutions to problems impacting their local or global community.

Healthy Futures: Service-learning programs are beginning to make substantial progress by combining teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities with K-12 school based programs. For instance, in Kentucky a consortia of universities is training middle school educators in service learning as a means to meet their STEM requirements. Participating teachers are guiding their students as they develop an analysis of their school's natural environment and identifying ways to make their schools greener. The program teaches core STEM subjects while engaging young people in community improvement programs.

***What do State Commissions, national intermediaries, and other partners view as the best strategies for reaching and developing new program sponsors?***

***What kind(s) of assistance do grantees need to continue delivering high quality programs and to expand?***

Community-based organizations nationwide have identified service-learning as a model they would like to employ in their youth development programming. But currently, the infrastructure to train and support those organizations is insufficient or, in some states, totally lacking. The same is true for schools and colleges/universities who want to engage their students in service-learning. Designating a portion of PDAT funds to support infrastructure for service-learning professional development within each state could help CNCS provide much-needed support to numerous schools and organizations vital to expanding the number of young people ages 5 to 22 who are contributing their time and effort to improve their communities.

***Should the Service Corps outlined in the Act (education, healthy futures, clean energy, veterans and economic opportunity) be focus areas within AmeriCorps or programs with their own identity?***

***How should CNCS and its partners manage the growth of service brands?***

The term service-learning represents a wide and diverse field. Through the Learn and Serve America grant program CNCS reaches only a small section of the full service-learning field. That fact creates both a challenge and an opportunity for CNCS when it comes to building a brand for LSA. The challenge is that very few organizations see CNCS as their primary funder for youth development or service-learning. So, LSA does not have the natural brand affiliations that it has with AmeriCorps grantees (e.g. City Year) which receive a much higher percentage of their funds from CNCS and work naturally to build the AmeriCorps brand. The opportunity that this arrangement creates is equally as large. Service-learning is employed by a broad swath of organizations, schools and school districts not directly dependent on CNCS funds, but nonetheless interested in affiliating with the brand. To create a brand for LSA CNCS will have to look beyond associating the brand with grantees to associating the brand with everyone employing service-learning. There are a number of ways to do this. CNCS could build a recognition programs, invest in training programs, recognize individual young people for their work on service learning programs and other approaches.

That said, CNCS can also do more to require its Learn and Serve America grantees and subgrantees to use the LSA brand in a more intentional and strategic way. For example, Learn and Serve America grantees could be required to conduct ceremonial check presentations to their local subgrantees. At first glance, this may appear to be a superficial activity. But if utilized well, it can be a well-organized opportunity to educate and inform local sites about the origins of the funding source; ensure local officials

are aware of LSA's presence in the school and community; and can be an opportunity to garner local media coverage of an event where the LSA is prominently featured and explained. Upon completion of service-learning activities, participating classroom teachers/youth leaders or youth participants can receive a LSA poster to display in their class or LSA patches to affix to their backpacks or t-shirts. Finally, LSA subgrantees can receive a welcome letter at the beginning of the program year or a congratulatory letter at the end of the program year from CNCS officials to thank them for their participation and to acknowledge their connection to the larger brand and LSA program.

## **Spurring Innovation and Supporting the Nonprofit Sector**

***The Act calls on the Corporation to become a hub of innovation and support for the nonprofit sector as a whole. How should the Corporation implement that goal?***

***What does the sector need that CNCS can provide with expanded service opportunities?***

***How should the Social Innovation Fund operate in order to provide seed money and scale-up capital for innovative and evidence-based programs?***

Designate \$10 million of the Social Innovation Fund to support the incubation and scaling of organizations that are expanding access to service-learning. The Corporation for National and Community Service consistently recognizes that the dropout crisis is one of the most important challenges facing our nation today. The fact that over 1/3 of our students are not graduating from high school on time cost our country billions of dollars each year. Learn and Serve America is the only one of the Corporation's programs positioned to directly deal with this crisis. The Social Innovation Fund offers the opportunity to immediately scale up promising service-learning initiatives well-positioned to address this crisis. But, in order to be successful, successful service learning initiatives/organizations must combine an entrepreneurial approach to their work with the real challenges of working within school systems.

***How should the Volunteer Generation Fund operate to ensure we are maximizing its potential to support the recruitment and management of volunteers?***

Reserve funds for a pilot initiative that focuses on innovative and cost-effective ways to generate volunteers to support service-learning programs in local schools and communities.

***How should the Nonprofit Capacity Building Program be implemented to provide training and technical assistance to small and mid-sized non-profits?***

Create a category or designate a number of slots that will be reserved for nonprofits that commit to working with schools and/or colleges and universities to establish systemic service-learning initiatives to engage a critical mass of young people.

***How should the Serve America Fellows and Encore Fellows programs be implemented?***

***How much capacity is required of commissions to launch the Serve America Fellows program?***

***How should we develop the list of qualified eligible organizations?***

***How can we effectively spur innovation in service-learning?***

One way to spur innovation in service-learning is to call upon young people (and the schools and community-based organizations that engage them) to create innovative solutions to community problems through service-learning and to provide them with resources to make it happen. CNCS should designate at least \$5 million of the Social Innovation Fund to support a national challenge to schools/school districts and community-based youth programs to engage young people in creating innovative solutions to address or solve a specific community need or challenge through service-learning. These service-learning activities must be consistent with national standards for quality service-learning practice.

Another way to spur innovation in service-learning is to call for the creation of more systemic service-learning initiatives that operate within whole schools, school districts and/or communities. Programs that approach service-learning as an add-on or stand alone lack the necessary institutional support to be sustainable and the organizational momentum to deeply impact young people. CNCS must invest in systemic service-learning models in which participating school/school district and community partners must articulate or demonstrate a: shared vision, shared leadership, integration into the curriculum being used by the school and community partners, ongoing professional development, partnerships, and a commitment continuous improvement and evaluation. This will catalyze the creation of more innovative models of service-learning that are fundamentally designed to engage a critical mass of young people in service-learning activities that meet the national standards for quality service-learning practice and that provide adequate support for the practitioners and institutions involved.

### ***How should the new Innovative Service-Learning funds be utilized in Learn and Serve America?***

The Kennedy Serve America Act authorizes several new programs that could expand the depth and quality of service-learning across the country. But, attempting to developing these programs without adequate funding runs the risk of undermining their success. For instance, to develop and launch a Summer of Service program requires more than the \$6 million currently allotted to develop a substantial program that has a reasonable chance of success. It is vital that CNCS request adequate funds to support these programs in the future.

That said, it is important that these funds be utilized to bring K-12 school-based, community-based, and higher education partners together to create and expand service-learning opportunities for young people. Whether this takes place through STEM initiatives, Semester of Service, or the Youth Engagement Zones, it is vital that the sectors within the service-learning field come together to establish an initiative or programming that--at a minimum:

- (1) engages a critical number of young people in service-learning activities that take place in school and out of school;
- (2) supports service-learning experiences that are consistent with the standards for quality practice; and
- (3) provides adequate professional development for school and community-based practitioners.

### ***How should the Silver Scholarships program be implemented?***

### ***How should the Summer of Service program be implemented?***

The recommended funding level does not provide adequate resources to effectively implement a Summer of Service program. There are not even enough funds to implement the pilot initiative outlined in the Serve America Act. This program cannot be implemented until more resources have been provided.

## **Achieving Growth through Simpler Grantmaking**

### **\*\*UNDER DEVELOPMENT\*\***

*How can we make it easier and more attractive for non-profits to work with CNCS?*

*What are ways to reduce burden, avoid duplication and increase efficiency?*

*How can the Corporation consolidate the application process most effectively?*

*How can the Corporation reduce reporting requirements while still ensuring appropriate use of federal funds?*

*The Corporation intends to implement fixed amount grants for programs in which the cost of running the program is substantially more than the amount received in the grant. To accomplish this, the Corporation must know the costs of each type of program in order to set the “fixed” grant amount. From the grantee perspective, what are the known costs for programs with part-time members?*

*What are the operational benefits/challenges from the grantee perspective of fixed-amount grants?*

*How do we structure fixed-price grants so that they realize the promise of a reduction in burden, while at the same time providing better information about impact?*