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Global Service Fellowships: Building Bridges through American Volunteers

BY DAVID L. CAPRARA, JOHN BRIDGELAND
AND HARRIS WOFFORD

As policy-makers search for ways to share the best of America with the world, they should start with our international volunteers, who embody this country's spirit of generosity, resourcefulness and hope. With the support of Congress and the Bush Administration, volunteers can become the first face of America to communities in many nations, while advancing concrete initiatives that lift up the lives of the poor throughout the world.



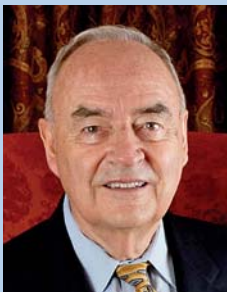
Cross-Cultural Solutions

To maximize the potential of international volunteering, we propose that Congress establish a program of Global Service Fellowships to support American volunteers—nominated by congressional members—serving abroad with qualifying nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, and universities that are committed to advancing peace and development. Initial funding of \$50 million would support approximately 10,000 fellowships annually averaging \$5,000 each to pay for volunteers' travel, program costs, and minimal living expenses. In addition, Congress and the White House should work together to double the Peace Corps, authorize and provide support to Volunteers for Prosperity, and increase support of other efforts inside and outside government to enable global service and assess its impact. These efforts will empower a growing coalition of international volunteering organizations to help reach the goal of 100,000 Americans serving in developing countries each year.

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The role of international volunteer service in building bridges across growing global divides has never been more critical to the future of our nation, and global peace and stability. Building on the exemplary work of the Peace Corps, a growing field of nongovernmental organizations, faith-based entities, universities, and corporate service programs seek to help communities abroad while enhancing the lives of volunteers. In addition to bringing tangible benefits to the people they serve, members of this new cadre of international volunteers also tend to develop enduring habits of civic engagement and lasting appreciation of foreign partners and perspectives. This strengthens America's civil society, advances public diplomacy objectives abroad, and deepens American understanding of forces beyond our borders.

This movement of international volunteers could be greatly enhanced by congressional leadership to provide America's volunteers with expanded service opportunities that would help improve perceptions of the United States abroad. To maximize the potential of international volunteering, we propose that Congress pursue a global service agenda centering on a new program of congressionally-nominated Global Service Fellowships, along with doubling the Peace Corps, authorizing and supporting Volunteers for Prosperity, and increased support of technical assistance and multi-lateral exchanges. These efforts will empower a growing coalition of international volunteering organizations to help reach the goal of 100,000 Americans serving in developing countries each year.

The unique power of volunteer service has been key to the vitality of our nation since its birth. In the mid-nineteenth century, historian Alexis de Tocqueville noted the

unique contributions of voluntary organizations as a core strength of our young democracy. In the following two centuries, presidents from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush have recognized that volunteering is one of America's greatest exports.

A longitudinal study conducted by Abt Associates for the Corporation for National and Community Service noted the profound long-term impact of extended service in domestic programs like AmeriCorps on participants' civic engagement. These benefits include increased volunteer connections and participation in their community, knowledge of local community challenges such as the environment, health, and crime, and personal growth through strengthened habits of citizenship and service.

Service abroad brings the additional benefit of forging personal relationships between generous Americans and poor citizens of foreign lands. While American volunteers come home with a lifelong appreciation of the challenges faced by developing countries, citizens of those nations gain personal experience of American generosity and humanity.

The potential power of these efforts are evidenced in the results of a recent Terror Free Tomorrow poll, which showed a markedly positive change in major Muslim nations' perceptions of the United States in response to humanitarian relief and service initiatives. Polling data indicated that nearly 60 percent of Indonesians and 75 percent of Pakistanis held more favorable views of the United States following humanitarian assistance after their tsunami and earthquake tragedies. Importantly, this change in perception lasted beyond the initial aid and service, underscoring that America's actions can have lasting impact.

One illustrative international volunteer example is Kimberly Priebe of Schaumburg, Illinois, who was recently honored by USA Freedom Corps for her service as a World Teach volunteer teaching English in a community college in Vilcabamba, Ecuador. While serving in Ecuador for one year, Ms. Priebe published columns back home that described the serious educational needs of the population in Vilcabamba. After reading the columns, the residents of Schaumburg responded by sending contributions to establish 100 scholarships for young people to attend the Vilcabamba community college. This support, generated by an American volunteer abroad, will foster benefits and bonds that will last beyond the scholarships and affect generations to come.

GLOBAL SERVICE FELLOWSHIPS

International volunteering and service should be re-engaged with the level of commitment and imagination exhibited by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 with the launch of the Peace Corps. This legacy should be adapted to meet the twenty-first century's unique challenges of global conflict and human development. And it should leverage the twenty-first century's remarkable wealth of organizations outside of government, such as NGO and faith-based partners, corporations and universities committed to advancing global development to meet the goal of engaging 100,000 Americans serving abroad annually.

We ask Congress and the president to raise their sights to these goals by embracing a global service agenda that would empower a wider range of Americans of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and professional skills to

respond to a call to service meeting critical humanitarian needs and achieving vital civic diplomacy objectives.

As a centerpiece of this agenda, Congress should authorize a new Global Service Fellowship to support qualifying organizations outside of government that have the commitment and the capacity to sponsor volunteers abroad to advance concrete development objectives. Initial funding of \$50 million would support approximately 10,000 fellowships annually averaging \$5,000 to pay for volunteers' travel, program costs, and minimal living expense. This is a fraction of the cost of supporting a Peace Corps volunteer for one year. Global Service Fellowships ranging from both short-term placements of up to six months, to lengthier one year assignments can be an effective "on ramp" both to longer Peace Corps service and a lifetime of civic engagement.

This new initiative, involving government support for individuals in non-profit and faith-based groups, builds on the successful model created by AmeriCorps at home. AmeriCorps has placed volunteers in a variety of civic, community, and faith-based groups. This has strengthened the voluntary organizations while also broadening service opportunities well beyond those available through entities formally connected with government. It is a model that creates a powerful virtuous circle: government can leverage resources beyond its own, and worthy voluntary groups get needed help in building their own capacities to engage millions of Americans in service to the nation.

Global Service Fellowship recipients would be nominated by each U.S. representative and senator, and awards made in the form of a voucher to defray travel



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and program living expenses redeemable through qualifying international voluntary service NGOs, faith-based organizations, and overseas service learning programs with universities and colleges. Fellowship applicants would initially apply through participating international service programs and, upon acceptance, would submit their Fellowship application to their congressional office for nomination to the appropriate oversight agency.

To promote increased socio-economic diversity in the international service field, added weight in the selection process could be given to qualified applicants coming from households with income less than 200 percent of poverty level. Applicants with demonstrated prior community service experience would, likewise, be given added consideration, as would applicants from skilled disciplines addressing specific host country needs.

IMPACT PRIORITIES

Participating volunteering programs would collaborate with local host country organizations in developing programs that address local needs for volunteer skill-transfer, capacity building, and cross-cultural service objectives. Fellowship proposals should focus on one or more designated impact priorities that reinforce the key objectives of U.S. foreign assistance programs and international development compacts, including:

- eradication of extreme poverty through achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals;
- achieving universal primary education;
- promoting gender equality and empowering women and families;
- reducing child mortality and improving maternal health;
- providing medical and dental health care and prevention;
- providing assistance for the elderly, orphans, people with disabilities, and refugees;
- promoting environmental sustainability;
- providing economic and social opportunities for youth in countries with growing cohorts of young people;
- engaging youth service and building volunteer-sector capacity in host countries;
- combating HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other infectious diseases;
- helping to build or provide decent housing;
- providing disaster and humanitarian response and preparedness;
- promoting cross-cultural exchange, conflict resolution, and peace;
- developing global partnerships for development in the arenas of economic growth, micro-enterprise, and agricultural and rural development; and,
- advancing access to information technology and strengthening civil society.

Programs may contribute to impact priorities through direct service, indirect service, or capacity building, or a combination thereof.

ELIGIBLE SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

Global Service Fellowship applicants must be registered with a qualifying sponsoring organization engaged in priority impact areas, including:

- U.S.-based non-governmental organizations that sponsor international volunteer service;
- faith-based organizations engaged in non-sectarian service delivery;
- universities and colleges operating international service-learning and volunteer service programs; and
- local or national host government agencies promoting national and community service in designated impact areas.

Programs registered with a qualifying national agency will agree to follow widely accepted standards of performance and accountability, including annual financial audits, liability insurance for program participants, and other standards of performance and integrity. Program standards adopted by the International Volunteer Programs Association and other comparable organizations in the volunteering field will be examined by the qualifying national agency that will establish guidelines for eligible sponsoring organizations.

Global Service Fellowship appropriations and oversight could be placed within the jurisdiction of an agency such as the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of Citizen Exchanges, in cooperation with the U.S. Agency for International Development's Volunteers for Prosperity.

The extensive experience and expertise of bodies such as the Institute of International Education, which manages implementation of international education exchange and global development programs for the State Department, and the International Volunteer Program Association, could inform operational implementation and standards for the Global Fellowship Program. Congressionally approved programs that address issues such as global health and development, foreign aid, and reduction of international conflict could also engage international volunteers receiving a Global Service Fellowship.

PROJECT EXPENSE ELIGIBILITY

Successful fellowship applicants would receive funding commitments redeemable through the organization sponsoring the project. Eligible costs would include:

- airfare, accommodations, and in-country transportation,
- sponsoring organization fees to defray international service program costs and program administration,
- subsistence allowance in line with local market conditions,
- program materials and tools used for service-related purposes,
- local service project seed support, and
- language and cultural training, and other pre-service project orientation costs.

Recipients of Global Service Fellowships of up to three months in duration would be eligible for \$2,500 for program costs; three- to six-month fellowship recipients would

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be eligible for \$5,000; and Fellowship recipients engaged in projects lasting from seven months to one year would be eligible for up to \$7,500. These general estimates are based on cost ranges and experience of the international volunteer service field. The sponsoring and host organizations would be responsible for project sustainability through a combination of local capacity building and recruitment and placement of local volunteers.

University students selected as fellows could not apply funding towards normal tuition; only expenses incurred as a direct result of service learning programs that demonstrate clear international service impacts would qualify for support.

We recommend that authorizing legislation also provide for public-private partnership options to leverage and match Fellowship resources with other sources of program support. For example, matching fund initiatives could be allowed for innovative leveraging with corporate fellowship and international volunteering programs. Pfizer, IBM, GE, UPS, Timberland, and other companies have launched a global corporate volunteering

affinity group and commissioned the Foundation Strategy Group to assess best practices that should be examined by the administering Global Service Fellowship national agency.

OTHER FELLOWSHIP PROVISIONS

Additional fellowship provisions would include the following:

- fellows must be U.S. citizens;
- collaboration with local U.S. embassies would be encouraged to assist local partnership building and facilitate visa applications by American volunteers;
- volunteers would be able to defer student loans for the duration of their service; and,
- applicants must clearly describe their plan for sharing their experiences with others (particularly in their home congressional district) upon returning to the United States through classroom presentations, local newspaper articles, follow-up service projects and research, or subsequent international exchanges.

A GLOBAL SERVICE AGENDA

To fully leverage the potential of global volunteer service to lift up the lives of the world's poorest citizens, promote peace and security, and deepen understanding of our foreign partners abroad will require a set of mutually reinforcing initiatives on the part of the White House and Congress. Fortunately, these steps are long on impact for relatively modest funding and are likely to win the support of a broad spectrum of Americans.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Authorize appropriations for a new Global Service Fellowship Program—Establish a \$50 million Global Service Fellowship Program providing for 10,000 volunteer fellowships annually averaging \$5,000 each.

Double the Peace Corps—Increase appropriations to enable the Peace Corps



Former Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered remarks in June 2006 at the Brookings Institution. His speech centered on international service and cultural exchange. "Don't sell us short," he stated, "One way not to sell us short is to take that which we still have as a valuable commodity, who we are and what we are, and send it overseas in the form of volunteers."

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to grow from 7,800 to 14,000 members by its fiftieth anniversary in 2011.

Authorize and provide support to the Volunteers for Prosperity program at USAID—Provide authority and funding to further the goal of linking U.S. foreign assistance efforts with highly skilled professional volunteers by expanding from 20,000 to 40,000 volunteers.

Authorize and provide support to the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation—Make this current presidential council permanent (similar to the President's Council on Physical Fitness).

Support the development of metrics evaluating the impact of international

volunteering—Preserve congressional support for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics baseline research and tracking of domestic and international volunteering. Provide funding for impact research and assessment of international volunteering best practices, and enhanced collaboration among universities, research institutions, and United Nations Volunteers.

Increase funding for the State Department's Bureau of Culture and Educational Assistance volunteering exchanges—Expand dedicated technical assistance and travel funding for international exchanges in volunteering initiatives to build capacity for volunteer centers and promote national policies in countries seeking assistance.



The policy recommendations in this brief were developed in conjunction with leading international volunteering practitioners engaged in the Brookings Institution's Initiative on International Volunteering and Service and the Building Bridges Coalition.



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE ACTION

Encourage increased private-sector support—Assist the establishment of international service philanthropic funds linking global volunteering with high-impact project opportunities. USAID's Global Development Alliance could develop a prototype for this approach with international volunteering organizations, corporations, and foundations.

Utilize U.S. Embassies to fast-track visas for American volunteers abroad and promote multinational volunteering exchanges—The State Department and embassies in host countries could serve to help expedite American volunteers' visas and to promote increased bilateral and multilateral volunteer exchanges, including "reverse volunteering."

Link the President's Malaria Initiative and President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief to sources of volunteer support, including faith-based and community volunteer initiatives—The White House, USA Freedom Corps, and Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives are well-positioned to link international volunteering (including the proposed Global Service Fellowship) with the president's efforts on malaria and HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention.

Together, these steps will coordinate and expand the efforts of a broad spectrum of American volunteers in a robust national effort aimed at enhancing global understanding while improving lives through service. If we are serious about enhancing global security and prosperity, we should include the natural proponents of America's optimism, care, and generosity—our volunteers—as part of the solution. *B*

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