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Will America Embrace National Service?

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Executive Summary

This paper examines the case for national service, highlights the various ways in which that service could unfold, and concludes that large-scale national service is needed in America now.

America's civic health is in significant decline. The percentage of Americans who say others can be trusted fell from 46 percent in 1972 to just 31 percent in 2016, with 36 percent of Whites and 17 percent of Blacks expressing such trust; and, in recent years, trust in the media, government, and the courts has fallen to historic lows.¹ It is no surprise that communities are fraying in places like Charlottesville, Ferguson and Baltimore, and that America is not fulfilling its potential, as political institutions suffer from partisan gridlock, and the institutions that serve as checks on power and as guarantors of individual rights are increasingly under attack.

Over the last quarter-century, much of the best biogenetics research and neuroscience has indicated that human beings are probably more hard-wired than not by evolution to empathize, cooperate, and coalesce.² Today, however, only 28 percent of Americans say they belong to any group with leaders they consider accountable and inclusive; and four large-scale, integrating civic institutions built up during the 1900s have shrunk significantly since the turn of the century: churches and other religious congregations; unions; metropolitan daily newspapers; and political parties for grassroots participation that persisted past particular campaigns.³ As the "Pluribus" in "E Pluribus Unum" becomes even more diverse and we need to cultivate a greater sense of "we," America will need civic bridges that span our nation's demographic divides and socioeconomic fault lines.

One powerful idea to rebuild our civic bridges is universal national service—an expectation and opportunity that young people as they come of age perform a year or more of military or civilian national service. Such service would bring young people from different backgrounds, income levels, races, ethnicities, and areas of the country together in shared experiences to solve public challenges as they form their attitudes and habits early in life. Many would discover that they are leaders—the kind of leaders who could work across differences to get things done. There would be other positive effects.

Across 139 studies, positive outcomes for national service exceeded null or negative effects by a ratio of about 7 to 1, with the largest positive effects related to the server's skill development, direct beneficiaries, service expansion, service quality, and volunteer mobilization.⁴ In addition, a 2013 study prepared for the Franklin Project and Civic Enterprises in association with Voices for National Service reports a benefit-cost ratio of \$3.9:\$1 for CNCS programs and all of their respective partners (City Year, Youth Build, the Senior Companion Program, and many others).⁵

In this paper's opening section (**Section 1**), we outline the case for making universal national service a reality.

In the second through the fifth sections of this paper,⁶ we raise various questions about several standard pro-universal national service arguments and assumptions:

- *Does public support for national service programs like those presently sponsored by the federal government run both deep and wide (Section 2)?*
 - We suspect that it runs wider than it runs deep, but we need much better polling than presently exists to find out and studies of how national service heats divides across race, ethnicity, income, geography, faith and politics among corps members.
- *Do either service programs in general, or marquee, tax-supported programs like AmeriCorps in particular, or both, yield predictably and reliably positive returns on dollars invested and hours dedicated (Section 3)?*
 - In a word, “probably,” but more balanced benefit-cost analyses and more robust program evaluation studies should be welcomed by both fans and foes of universal national service.
- *Is support for universal national service in sync with the civic traditions that are etched into the saga of the U.S. Selective Service System; and, is the American preference for voluntary over mandatory service exceptional in relation to what most other nations do or have done in this civic domain (Section 4)?*
 - In two words, “yes” and “no”—yes, universal national service could be the next best chapter in the U.S. Selective Service System saga; and, no, far from being exceptional, the American preference for voluntary over mandatory national service is mirrored all across the globe.
- *Is mandatory national service as problematic constitutionally as is generally believed; and, if not, is the case for universal but strictly voluntary national service merely the more politically feasible of two goods—or, as national service naysayers might say, merely the lesser of two evils (Section 5)?*
 - We find mandatory national service to be far less problematic constitutionally than it is generally believed to be and have secured a legal opinion from a nationally-reputable law firm confirming this conclusion. Politically, however, mandatory national service is impossible, and advocating for it probably does more to undermine than to undergird the case for universal voluntary national service.

In the paper's closing section (**Section 6**), as a concrete “next first step” toward universal national service, we prescribe eliminating the gap between the number of qualified and eager-to-serve applicants to the number of national service opportunities available, and we outline principles and policies for model legislation to achieve that goal and related ones. Given the state of our civic decline, large-scale voluntary national service is an idea whose time has certainly come.

To access the appendices, see here: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/National-Service_APPENDICES-1.pdf

Introduction

Engaging generations of Americans in service to the nation is an idea as old as our country's founding, but one that has never fulfilled its potential to heal our divisions, solve public challenges, and develop the leaders our nation so desperately needs. This paper is an attempt to advance that cause and address hard questions that will better equip leaders at all levels to make the case for—and get the country moving toward—large-scale, voluntary national service.

To begin where we shall end, Americans of every demographic description and socioeconomic status, most particularly young adults, should be expected—and given the opportunity—to serve their country, help solve our nation's most pressing problems, and by sharing the hardship and fulfillment that service can offer, bind themselves to one another and to the nation.⁷

We acknowledge that spending additional money or imposing new responsibilities on citizens may have strong opposition. As we will show, however, this ignores the threat to the self-governing foundation of our democracy in an increasingly divided country. We are also fully cognizant that the Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS)'s programs, and cognate federally-supported national service programs, have had, and continue to have, significant managerial, information technology, and other administrative problems that the programs' detractors have cited when declaiming against “tax-paid volunteers.”⁸ But we are also fully cognizant that far worse and more persistent administrative, financial accountability, and performance problems plague the far larger Defense, Energy, Homeland Security and other departments through which Washington funnels more than \$550 billion a year to tax-paid contractors.⁹

We also know that some supporters of mandatory universal national service will view our prescription as paltry (or worse). But after a comprehensive two-year study of compulsory national service in the United States, we know how little support there is for a mandatory system. After years of experience in the White House and on Capitol Hill, we also know too much about how hard it was for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the AmeriCorps program to be seeded under President George H.W. Bush and created under President Bill Clinton, and in the two years after 9/11 under President George W. Bush, to expand the AmeriCorps program from 50,000 slots to 75,000 positions,¹⁰ and to grow Senior Corps and the Peace Corps to the highest levels in decades. Thus, it is difficult to consider our proposal as anything less than highly ambitious.

In 2014, AmeriCorps's 20th anniversary year, William Galston, who with Will Marshall, Shirley Sagawa, and others was among the program's founding advocates and architects, aptly observed that AmeriCorps had “survived and thrived in the face of considerable odds.”¹¹ The program's survive-and-thrive saga continues.

In 2019, AmeriCorps's 25th anniversary year, the White House's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget request to Congress called for eliminating CNCS, which is home to AmeriCorps,

VISTA and Senior Corps;¹² but, also in 2019, 185 U.S. House members co-sponsored an “ACTION for National Service” bill that would dramatically expand AmeriCorps and other federally-sponsored programs.¹³ We also are encouraged by the nation’s longstanding interest in national service through such large-scale efforts as the Civilian Conservation Corps, and smaller, but effective efforts such as the Peace Corps and Youth Build. And we note that Congress is already on the record for increasing national service positions from approximately 65,000 full-year positions to 250,000 positions every year under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, passed with strong bipartisan support in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and signed into law on April 21, 2009.¹⁴ The Act was never funded at those levels, however, after a multi-year effort to get it enacted.

The empirical evidence that AmeriCorps and other federally-supported national service programs have net social, civic, and economic benefits is not complete and definitive, but it is credible and suggestive; and, unlike most federal agencies many times its size, CNCS has promoted real program evaluation studies and developed meaningful performance metrics.¹⁵ Thus, we conclude this paper (**Section 6**) by proposing that all qualified applicants to several time-tested federal government-sponsored service programs—AmeriCorps, VISTA, Senior Corps, National Civilian Conservation Corps, Youth Build, and Peace Corps—be accepted, supported, and empowered to serve.

Section 1: All Grown Up with No Place to Serve

Democratic citizenship bestows individual rights and betokens civic responsibilities. Service makes citizens. In every generation, Americans who have undertaken national service—in the military or in a civilian capacity—have emerged more connected to their generation and more invested in their country. Making national service a universal expectation—a new American rite of passage from youth to adulthood—will renew and redefine for this generation the role of citizens in our democracy and promote an understanding of rights and responsibilities.

Service shaped the Greatest Generation. The earliest example of large-scale, full-time civilian national service—the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)—mobilized more than 3 million young, unemployed men to improve our public lands during the Great Depression.¹⁶ The experience also showed how quickly the nation could move to create such service opportunities. In March 1933, Franklin Roosevelt called Congress into emergency session to authorize, among other things, the CCC to bring together two threatened resources—young men who were out of work in the midst of the Great Depression and public lands beset by soil erosion and a declining number of trees.

Within five weeks, Congress had enacted the CCC into law and by the first summer, 250,000 young men were serving in more than 2,500 camps in every state.¹⁷ Over the life of the program from 1933 to 1942, more than 3 million men planted some 3 billion trees, constructed 97,000 miles of fire roads, erected 3,470 fire towers, and helped preserve more than 84 million acres of agricultural land (about the equivalent acreage of our

National Park System today). The U.S. Army played a leading role in organizing the effort, including leadership from a young George C. Marshall. It was the first major example of a large-scale civilian national service effort in America that also married the military and civilian communities.

The service ethic fostered during the Great Depression informed the attitudes and habits of a generation. More than 12 percent of Americans went on to serve in the Second World War, while many Americans served on the home front to support the effort.¹⁸

In the unprecedented prosperity that followed the war, the Greatest Generation served more, joined organizations more, gave more in charitable contributions, attended church, school, and community activities more, and were active neighbors helping those in need more than the generations preceding or following them.¹⁹

During those same post-war years in which our civic stocks rose, Americans voted more, entered public service in greater numbers, and enjoyed much lower levels of political polarization than we see now.²⁰ National service was also understood as a way to express gratitude for a country that preserves our freedom.²¹

Of course, having universal national service is no guarantee that today's young adult Americans will become tomorrow's next "Greatest Generation." But not having universal national service needlessly turns away hundreds of thousands of young Americans who are raising their hands to serve their country every year and does guarantee that today's patriotic, service-hearted young adults will have no real chance to try on and fill out big civic shoes like the ones worn by their grandparents or great grandparents. And it is a virtual guarantee that certain disturbing and democracy-draining civic trends—lower levels of social and institutional trust, volunteering, voting, and participation in civic groups—will continue.

Making Civic Deserts Bloom

America's civic health is in significant decline. For example, Americans have lost trust in each other and in major civic institutions. Such trust is critical to a functioning democracy. The percentage of Americans who say others can be trusted fell from 46 percent in 1972 to just 31 percent in 2016, with 36 percent of Whites and 17 percent of Blacks expressing such trust. In recent years, trust in the media, government, and the courts have fallen to historic lows.²² The relationship between this decline in trust and the rise in the number of hate groups (up more than 200 percent since 1999)²³ might or might not be causal, but it is probably no mere coincidence.

Over the last quarter-century, much of the best biogenetics research and neuroscience has indicated that human beings are probably more hard-wired than not by evolution to empathize, cooperate, and coalesce.²⁴ From the mid-nineteenth century—from the Americans who Alexis de Tocqueville witnessed peripatetically creating or joining religious and secular "societies" that serve civic purposes,²⁵ to the armies of American soldiers, voters, volunteers, neighbors, and charitable donors of the mid-20th century—anyone looking for a society-wide Exhibit A for the proposition that we are pro-social animals might have done worse than to look to America.

Today, however, only 28 percent of Americans say they belong to any group with leaders they consider accountable and inclusive; and four large-scale, integrating civic institutions built up during the 1900s have shrunk significantly since the turn of the century: churches and other religious congregations; unions; metropolitan daily newspapers; and political parties for grassroots participation that persisted past particular campaigns.²⁶ It remains unclear what institutions, if any, are taking their place, but universal national service programs could help us to regain civic ground.

Americans are also less active in important ways that undergird a healthy democracy. Regular volunteering decreased from about 30 percent of the population in the aftermath of 9/11 through 2005 to less than one-quarter of Americans in 2016, a drop that occurred despite numerous natural disasters that typically inspire Americans to lend a hand.²⁷ A recent uptick in volunteering seems to be related to the anxiety Americans are feeling at government dysfunction at the national level.

By the same token, no matter how one measures it or which variables one uses to explain it, “voter turnout is lower today than it was in the early twentieth century,” and in recent national elections, some 80 million eligible voters did not vote, a remarkable statistic for a system built on such participation.²⁸

When trends in social fragmentation, cultural narcissism, political polarization, and economic inequality are examined together since the beginning of the twentieth century, those trends have moved in virtual lockstep. There was increasing economic equality, political comity, social cohesion, and cultural solidarity from about 1900 to 1965, with a sharp U-turn in the 1960s, followed by plunges toward inequality, polarization, fragmentation, and narcissism, and figuring in today’s majority view that the country “is on the wrong track,”²⁹ and in half of all Americans doubting that “ordinary citizens can influence government if they make an effort.”³⁰

We know from history that national service can play a transformational role in knitting the country back together in common purpose and promoting a stronger culture of “we.”

As the “Pluribus” in “E Pluribus Unum” becomes ever more diverse, we need civic bridges that span our nation’s demographic divides and socioeconomic fault lines. Universal national service can help to build or rebuild our civic bridges.

Burning Rather than Building Civic Bridges

Unfortunately, however, far too much has been done to burn rather than to build or rebuild such civic bridges, while far too little has been done either to maximize the expectation and opportunities to serve the nation or simply to meet the existing, well-documented demand for service opportunities.

Even as laudable and enduring efforts—such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, Senior Corps, Youth Build, and AmeriCorps—have sprouted since the Second World War, our opportunities for national service, both military and civilian, have dangerously narrowed rather than vigorously expanded. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan represented the first time in history that less than half of 1 percent of our population served on active duty during wartime.³¹

With limited opportunities for full-time service, the rising generation seeks additional outlets for its patriotism or desire to give back, but is perennially stymied. For example, one survey estimated that, if asked and promised only minimal pay, more than a million Americans would serve each year.³²

But, estimates aside, we know that since the CNCS began in 1990, it has had more service applicants than opportunities—lots more. For instance, AmeriCorps applications jumped from approximately 360,000 in 2009 to more than 582,000 in 2011, a 62 percent increase in just two program years. But, in 2011, only 82,500 AmeriCorps slots were available and many of these were part-time, reduced part-time or “education award” only. In most years over the last decade or so, the AmeriCorps applicants-to-opportunities ratio has probably run somewhere between three to five applicants for every one available slot. AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes surveys indicate that more than 80 percent of the program’s national service alumni credit their experience with rendering them more likely to attain a college degree, vote, volunteer, care about community problems, and know how to effect practical solutions to such problems.

The Peace Corps has a similar history in terms of turning away the idealism of generations of young people who want to serve. President John F. Kennedy told Sargent Shriver and Harris Wofford, the two aides who led the development of the Peace Corps, that it would be “truly serious” when 100,000 Americans were serving in the Peace Corps every year and 1 million over a decade, which would cultivate Americans who understood foreign languages, cultures, and beliefs and would foster greater cooperation among peoples of different countries. The Peace Corps only enrolls 7,300 volunteers today, notwithstanding the benefits of the program.

The first nationally representative survey of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) on the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps showed that 82 percent of RPCVs believed their service was effective in helping promote a better understanding of Americans in the communities where they served across all five decades of the Peace Corps, 91 percent said the Peace Corps improved the perception of the U.S. globally, 79 percent said their service helped to promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans, and more than half believed it had an effect on improving U.S. national security.³³ After 9/11, there were more than 150,000 requests for applications to the Peace Corps and only 7,000 positions available.³⁴ The Peace Corps estimates that there are, on average every year, three to five times as many applicants for Peace Corps positions as there are slots.

Thus, by turning away ready, willing, and able AmeriCorps and Peace Corps applicants year after year after year, we have been denying millions of mostly young adult Americans the opportunity to serve their country, stimulate long-term civic commitments, and build practical problem-solving capacities and workplace skills that can last a lifetime.

And the losses only begin there: AmeriCorps and Peace Corps’ successful applicants serve, support and strengthen some 20,000 faith-based and community organizations each year, and have figured in responses to acute and chronic national and international challenges such as the human, physical, and financial recovery processes in New Orleans

and other Gulf Coast communities that in the mid-2000s followed Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the deaths caused by malaria in sub-Saharan Africa.

Just by meeting the AmeriCorps and Peace Corps-specific demand for national and international service opportunities over the last quarter-century and 50 years, respectively, we could have substantially multiplied our civic yield both for those served and for those who served them.

We could have, but we didn't at the kind of scale that met the appetite of young people, not even after 9/11, and not even after the disasters in the Gulf Coast wrought by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. After 9/11 was the last time the nation increased national service positions, with a 50 percent increase in AmeriCorps, hundreds of thousands of additional positions in Senior Corps, and increases in Peace Corps to the highest levels in decades. Having said this, even those increases proposed by the President and funded by the Congress, after intense efforts to make national service a top Presidential priority, were a fraction of what was needed to meet the demand from young and older Americans alike to serve their neighbors and nation.

Since that time to be sure, in the wake of these and other national mega-challenges, new, national service-friendly federal legislation such as the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act was enacted, but unfunded. There was no surge in public support that translated into still more far-reaching federal support for universal national service. National service advocacy efforts then went back into defensive mode and worked hard to avoid cuts to programs, without a chance to grow them.

Could it be that public support for universal national service, whether voluntary or mandatory, has been, and continues to be, less deep and wide than service advocates like ourselves have commonly supposed or casually asserted?

Section 2: Public Opinion on National Service

When it comes to public opinion on consequential and controversial civic issues, the only thing harder than knowing what the public (or any given subpopulation) truly thinks is knowing how to predictably and reliably change people's views. Mass or majority public support is not always a condition for large and lasting changes in public law and policy, but it is almost certain that no universal national service program, either voluntary or, doubly so, mandatory, could be started or sustained without trading substantially on what in political science jargon is termed "opinion-policy congruence."

So, in Appendix 1, we offer a primer on public opinion and outline some of the inadequacies of extant survey data on national service. Below, we offer a few general ideas about how better surveys could help in designing national service proposals that might prove palatable in the courts of public opinion, in courts of law, among demographically diverse potential participants, and among ideologically diverse political and civic leaders.

Taken at face value, the polling data of relevance to national service dating back to the creation of AmeriCorps in 1993 can be broadly interpreted to yield one overarching conclusion and two corollary findings.

The overarching conclusion is that most Americans of every demographic description, socioeconomic status, partisan identification, and ideological disposition favor “national service” if it is “voluntary” (meaning either unpaid, or not required by law, or both) and oppose it if it is “mandatory” or “compulsory” (as in required by law and administered/enforced/funded by government).

One corollary finding is that the in-favor majorities shrink some but hold if “voluntary” is government-supported. When asked whether they favor maintaining or increasing funding for “national service” or “community service” programs, most people say “yes,” and the in-favor rates differ relatively little by partisan self-identification and other identifiers; but the general public and subpopulations are less inclined to express pro-national service views when the questions reference government, tax-funding, or specific or actual programs like AmeriCorps.

Another corollary finding is that most people believe that “service,” whether “national” or “community,” paid or unpaid, benefits the servers (develops skills, enhances civic responsibility, furnishes educational opportunities, enhances self-esteem, increases tolerance for diversity); benefits the persons, organizations, and places served (supplies direct services to needy individuals, performs vital work for organizations, addresses public problems or critical community needs); and benefits the wider society (elevates citizenship, models civic responsibility, bridges socioeconomic and political divides).

But these results are derived from a limited universe of polls that are less than entirely well-constructed and well-conducted (sampling size or stratification issues, wording issues, and inference and interpretation issues). Compared to polling data on many other issues, including even other non-major issues like “faith-based initiatives,” the survey research of relevance to national service seems thin and brittle. To date, however, both the friends and foes of national service have generally either ignored or glossed over the surveys’ shortcomings in a manner that reflects their respective beliefs and biases.

In Appendix 1, we consider each of three surveys with pro-national service titles and/or bottom lines to show how public opinion on national service could be improved.

Taking Polling on National Service Seriously

As the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan liked to quip, everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts. That includes the facts about public opinion on any given issue.

If we are serious about advancing universal national service plans that might prove palatable not only in courts of public opinion but in courts of law, among demographically diverse potential participants, and among ideologically diverse political and civic leaders,

then we need to get serious about polling on the subject. The things we seek to know via truly first-rate survey research might include the following:

- How much do adult Americans and different demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other subpopulations know about existing national service programs including but not limited to AmeriCorps, VISTA and the Peace Corps?
- What would diverse subpopulations, most especially the young adult target subpopulation(s) that might be the primary or sole participants, favor or oppose by way of different specific types of national service, whether voluntary or mandatory? What about the differences, if any, between populations who have completed college and those who are disconnected from school and work?
- How does opinion on given plans vary by the plan's proposed age ranges (e.g., targeted at or required of persons when ages 18 to 24, or 18 to 28); commitment time periods (e.g., a summer/less than a year, a year, more than a year); working conditions, training, and travel; restrictions, if any, on otherwise freely enjoyed liberties or rights; remuneration levels (how much?) and schedules (when paid?); extra benefits/penalties associated with fulfilling the requirement; focus areas/choice of jobs; and whether the program addresses public problems or civic needs perceived as critical?
- All other program particulars equal, among people who are opining on a particular set of program features with which they have already been made familiar, how much does labeling matter (e.g., terming the plan "universal" rather than "mandatory," or a "covenant to serve" versus a "civic compact")?
- By the same token, how much does any given programmatic feature matter to the level or the intensity of support/opposition among not only the general public (broken down by politically attentive/less attentive/inattentive, by voter profiles, etc.), but among the young adults who would be its sole or primary participants?

On national service, doing polling with scrupulous fidelity to best practices would probably cost several million dollars over several years. There are both for-profit firms and nonprofit university-based and other survey research organizations that could get the job done.

Without stacking the decks, we bet that state-of-the-art surveys would come out the way we hope they would, not least on items asking about specific services that federally-sponsored national service programs might address more and better if they had more workers and better funding:

- Assisting military families and veterans in adjusting back into civilian life;
- Mentoring/tutoring students in low-performing schools to keep them on track;
- Helping communities prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters;
- Cleaning up rivers, parks, blighted public areas, and coasts;
- Helping older Americans remain in their homes;
- Providing job training and career advice to low-income Americans;

- Incentivizing nonprofits, colleges, universities, and faith-based institutions to join a national service system by offering positions for Americans to serve for a year through their respective organizations;
- Amending the GI Bill to permit veterans to use a portion of their GI Benefits to support their performing a full year of civilian national service; and
- Amending the current Selective Service System so that every American receives information not only about opportunities to serve in the military but also in a civilian national service capacity.

Section 3: Is National Service Cost-Effective?

More surprising, perhaps, than the rather anemic state of survey research on national service is the paucity of first-rate empirical studies of the social, civic, and economic value of national service programs. Having examined the most widely cited studies, our main conclusions are as follows:

- Beyond studies of individual and informal volunteering, there are numerous studies suggesting that certain service programs—from small local programs to AmeriCorps—predictably, reliably, and cost-effectively yield pro-social and pro-civic benefits for the individuals who serve, the people whom they serve, the organizations that they serve, and the communities where they serve.
- Some randomized controlled trials show promising results for organizations such as City Year.
- No large-scale studies have confirmed the vitally important claim that national service could help heal divisions across politics, race, ethnicity, income and faith—this should be an urgent priority. A study of Teach for America, however, revealed that extended intergroup contact through national service caused advantaged Americans to adopt beliefs that are closer to those of disadvantaged Americans, with implications for understanding the impact of such intergroup contact on perceptions of social justice and prejudice reduction.³⁵
- Even many of the best of studies have severe limitations. Claims that given programs' benefits would definitely grow apace if the programs were radically expanded, like related claims that still greater benefits would flow from mandatory programs, are generally based on loose extrapolations, leaps of logic, and rosy assumptions.

The Benefits of Volunteering

In 2000, an article in the *Annual Review of Sociology* ably summarized what was known up to that point from peer-reviewed empirical social science and medical studies (ethnographic/exploratory, comparison group/quasi-experimental, and experimental) about volunteering, defined as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or cause.”³⁶ In addition to examining the evidence regarding the

etiology of volunteering and the variables associated with age, gender, race, and other differences in volunteering behavior, the literature review examined the evidence regarding whether “volunteering is beneficial for the helper as well as the helped.”³⁷

The evidence as reported in that literature review was more robust regarding the benefits of volunteering for the “helper” than for “the helped.” Specifically, above a certain threshold for time spent volunteering, other things equal, individuals who volunteered compared to otherwise comparable persons who did not volunteer experienced multiple positive outcomes: higher life-satisfaction and self-esteem; better self-rated health; better academic and occupational achievements; and longer lives. Among teenagers and young adults, the literature indicated that volunteering, *ceteris paribus*, was associated with lower rates of school truancy and drug abuse.

No literature review on the topic of comparable breadth has been published since 2000, but most of the scores of empirical studies of relevance published since then (as well as many studies, especially those examining individual health or health/happiness effects, that were published 1990 to 2000 but were not comprehended or referenced in that fine 2000 literature review) paint a virtually identical picture.³⁸

Of course, this evidence on the benefits of volunteering is not synonymous with the evidence on the benefits of volunteer programs or “national service.” Whether with respect to “helping out” at one’s church, neighborhood school, community eldercare facility, or in other ways, much of what counts (and, in these studies, gets counted) as volunteering occurs wholly outside the context of any regular commitments and any quasi-formal or formal programmatic or organizational setting or context.

...Versus the Benefits of Voluntary National Service Programs

For that reason, and as numerous scholars of the subject have stressed, when assessing the individual, group, institutional, and social, civic, or economic benefits of volunteering, it is important to distinguish between what might be termed non-programmatic volunteering, on the one side, and, on the other side, programmatic volunteering of the type that we think of when referencing “national service.”

For example, Charles Moskos has influentially defined “national service” as “the full-time undertaking of public duties by...citizen soldiers or civilian servers—who are paid subsistence wages.”³⁹ But a still more widely used definition of volunteering in relation to “the key attributes of service”—a definition followed with varying degrees of fidelity in many key studies of the effects of “national service”—is essentially as follows⁴⁰:

- The volunteer’s engagement is frequent and long-term (a full year or several consecutive months or more) rather than ad hoc or episodic.
- The volunteer’s programmatic activity is tangibly rewarded by one or more recognized organizations, with monetary payments generally being less than the activity’s labor market value.
- The program, whatever its size, treasury, or geography, is administered and/or financed (or co-managed and/or co-financed) via a nonprofit organization, college

or university, government agency, or hybrid institution that has formal-legal status and some stable organizational structure.

In the finest popular or quasi-academic treatises on the benefits of volunteering in concert with such national service programs, such as that by Shirley Sagawa,⁴¹ and in the cognate empirical social science and medical science studies of the same⁴² as well as parallel studies on national service in other nations,⁴³ the most widely cited benefits of voluntary national service are as follows:

- Improving or ennobling individual citizenship and civic-mindedness.
- Although more research needs to be done here, the claim is bridging myriad socioeconomic and demographic divides (ethnic, racial, religious, regional, cultural or subcultural, income/class, and other), building social capital, and promoting social pluralism and workplace diversity.
- Rendering citizen-participants more socially engaged and politically attentive or engaged, including more likely to vote and volunteer in the future.
- Benefitting other citizens, especially low-income people, needy children, the aged and infirm elderly.
- Contributing to solving significant public problems or doing substantial work that benefits entire communities, cities, or regions (homeless shelters, public parks and nature reserves, disaster relief, and many others).
- Adding to the community, regional, or national stock of wealth while reducing at the margin government spending.

Inveterate critics of national service to one side, almost nobody doubts the evidence, statistical and anecdotal, suggesting that voluntary national service programs (or at least many such programs under at least some conditions) yield one or more of the foregoing individual, communal, social, civic, or economic benefits.

In what remains the single most comprehensive analysis of the evidence on the benefits U.S. national service programs, James L. Perry and Anne Marie Thomson's 2004 book *Civic Service: What Difference Does It Make?*, the co-authors parsed 139 methodologically credible studies of fourteen separate if overlapping effects of national service programs on servers (skill development, civic responsibility, educational opportunity, self-esteem, tolerance, satisfaction from serving, and health), beneficiaries (impact on direct beneficiaries and impact on secondary beneficiaries), institutions (service expansion, improved service quality, spawn new institutions), and communities (strengthen community bonds, mobilizing volunteers).⁴⁴ Across these 139 studies, positive outcomes for national service exceeded null or negative effects by a ratio of about 7 to 1, with the largest positive effects related to the server's skill development, direct beneficiaries, service expansion, service quality, and volunteer mobilization.

Next Generation Benefit-Cost Analyses

But, as Perry and Thomson also stressed, properly assessing such impacts—properly doing a formal or quasi-formal social and civic benefit-cost analysis of any policy or program—must always be an analytical and data-gathering exercise in both addition and subtraction.

Unfortunately, one persistent problem with even the best empirical studies in this literature, past and present, is that they count direct and indirect program benefits but ignore or unduly discount attendant direct and indirect program costs. This species of problem is hardly unique to studies of national service; for example, the failure to use proper statistical controls, conjoined with the failure to calculate *net* social, civic, and economic benefits, has plagued research on the value of religiously-based volunteering and community-serving religious organizations.⁴⁵

Two analytical wrongs do not make a right. As one stalwart supporter of national service, Amitai Etzioni, reminded his pro-service colleagues, direct costs must be duly measured and figure in net benefits calculations, for volunteers must be “recruited, fed, housed, clothed, insured, covered medically, transported, and supervised—and in some cases rewarded for their service, say with college tuition” and/or salaries and other pecuniary benefits.⁴⁶ Moreover, even if a proper accounting on both sides of the benefit-cost ledger found unambiguously positive net benefits for any particular voluntary national service program, that would prove neither that expanding the same program would yield still greater benefits, nor that a mandatory version of the “same program” would have the same net positive outcomes, nor both.

Still, a promising start has been made in deciphering whether certain federal government-supported national service programs have net benefits. For example, in *The Economic Value of National Service*, a 2013 study prepared for the Franklin Project and Civic Enterprises in association with Voices for National Service, Clive Belfield, a researcher with the Center for Cost-Benefit Studies in Education at Columbia University, cites the aforementioned 2004 study by Perry and Thomson, and estimates the benefits of CNCS programs that mobilize youth via AmeriCorps and senior citizens via Senior Corps.⁴⁷

With a grand total of 125,750 Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs), these CNCS programs and all of their respective partners (City Year, Youth Build, the Senior Companion Program, and many others), the Belfield study reports a benefit-cost ratio of \$3.9:\$1. Essentially, this 4-to-1 bottom-line finding is derived by dividing the roughly \$2 billion it costs to field the 125,750 FTE national service members by the \$7.9 billion in social benefits that their service is estimated to generate.

But, as might be expected, the reported net benefits of national service vary by program. For example, the reported “net fiscal benefits” of national service by youth in AmeriCorps are 2.47. The calculations behind that bottom-line are captured in the present paper’s Table 1 (see below), and the corollary calculations associated with it, as explicated in the Belfield study’s appendices, involve estimates of the “social gains” ascribed to program participation including reductions in crime, welfare dependency, joblessness, ill health, and more.⁴⁸

A second, and perhaps still more fundamental, set of issues concerns extrapolations and assumptions like the following one: “Currently, there are approximately 125,750” FTEs in “formal national service programs,” versus “9 million... volunteers in less formal roles meaning that “there is considerable scope for expansion of national service programs.”⁴⁹

Table 1

Belfield Report’s Net Benefits of National Service by Youth: AmeriCorps

Full-Time Equivalents	38,550
<i>Economic Value (\$ millions/year)</i>	
Value of Services Provided	\$712
Private gains	\$1,878
Social gains	\$526
Fiscal gains	\$1,449
Total Social Benefits	+\$3,116
Total Social Cost	-\$884
Net Social Benefits	+\$2,232
Social Benefit-Cost Ratio	3.53
Total Fiscal Benefits	+\$1,449
Total Cost to Implement	-\$586
Net Fiscal Benefits	+\$862
Fiscal Benefit-Cost Ratio	2.47

Source: Adapted from Clive Belfield, *The Economic Value of National Service*, Franklin Project and Civic Enterprises in association with Voices for National Service, September 2013, p. 14.

We can each make an informed conjecture, but, in the absence of adequate survey research on the topic (see Section 2 above), there is no way to know what fraction of all volunteers would be interested either in voluntary national service program participation in general, or in these particular federally funded programs in particular. And, to say the least, we still have only guesses (and wishes that we ought not to make parents to the thought) regarding whether any nontrivial fraction of all youth or young adult volunteers would be between somewhat willing and quite eager when it comes to participating in any given species of decently compensated national service program, voluntary or mandatory.

Research on Service: Nine Rooms that Need Furnishing

As an old research saying goes, “An explanation is a place where the mind comes to rest.” With respect to any complex phenomenon, we never know all that we might wish to know or, through additional exertions, might yet come to know.

That duly noted, when it comes to estimating the social, civic, and economic value of service programs, we have let our minds come to rest prematurely and without making many serious research exertions. This is true both in absolute terms and even relative to a still relatively under-researched and kindred subject; namely, the extent, efficacy, and social, civic, and economic value of faith-based programs.⁵⁰

With respect to “religion,” there are at least three distinctive, though not mutually exclusive, “faith factors” that figure in the social, civic, and economic effects (if any) that different religious individuals or institutions might yield:

- Organic religion—related to whether and how strongly an individual believes in and feels motivated by ideas about a supernatural being or presence, e.g., beliefs and feelings about the Abrahamic God.
- Programmatic religion—related to whether and how frequently an individual participates, whether as a volunteer/staff member or as a beneficiary/recipient, in one or another type of religious institution (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.) and/or faith-based social services program.
- Ecological religion—related to whether and how much religious individuals and institutions are present in one’s personal, professional, or communal environment, independent of one’s own religious identity (if any) and participation (if any) in any religious institution and/or faith-based social services program.

Thus, one individual might be a highly religious person who volunteers at a faith-based program that is the only such program for miles where that person lives, shops, works, or relaxes; another person might be a strict non-believer who has no ties to any faith-based program as either worker or recipient, but who routinely drives through streets that are dotted by churches, synagogues, and mosques, and who shops at a local outdoor mall that is run by an inter-faith cooperative corporation; and so on.

By the same token, there are “three service factors”:

- Organic service -- what given individuals believe and feel about the morality and desirability of voluntary or compulsory service.
- Programmatic service — whether a person presently has or has had experience with a service program as either a volunteer/worker/staff member or a beneficiary/recipient, or both.
- Ecological service — independent of how, if at all, they identify with service, and what, if any, experiences they have had with service programs, how, and how much, people’s everyday lives are affected, knowingly or not, by a thin to thick ecology of service programs.

Tremendously complicated methodological challenges await anyone who might wish to know how, if at all, given service factors or combinations thereof affect given individuals’ or groups’ happiness, health, well-being, employment status, criminal victimization history, or whatnot compared to otherwise comparable individuals or groups without the same service factor(s) profile. (And methodological migraine headaches await anyone who contemplates phenomena that occur where faith-based programs and, say, a service program like AmeriCorps, intersect.)

At the same time, there are at least three different types of empirical research that might enable us to know how, if at all, any given service program affects its supporters/detractors, workers and/or beneficiaries, and wider publics:

- Ethnographic research — case studies, thick descriptions, participant-observer accounts, and so on.
- Quasi-experimental research — for example, conventional comparison group studies that vary in the degree to which they reduce problems attendant to such research such including selection bias.
- Experimental research — such as, for example, demonstration studies with random assignment like those that have been performed on work-based welfare programs and certain highly structured youth mentoring programs.

The three types of service factors (organic, programmatic, and ecological) and the three types of research (ethnographic, quasi-experimental, and experimental) give us, as it were, nine cells, boxes, or “rooms.”

Furnishing each of the nine rooms with more and better studies — ethnographic research about why some individuals are more fired up to serve than others; quasi-experimental research on different varieties of programs; ecological research on whether, other things equal, the sheer density of service programs has an independent effect on people’s lives; and a half-dozen others — would add to our empirical knowledge about the extent, efficacy, and social, civic, and economic impacts of assorted service initiatives and programs.

Doing so might also enhance our understanding of how such programs arise, persist, and change, while helping us to identify the conditions, if any, under which expanding them

in different ways might predictably and reliably yield net benefits of one or more types at an acceptable human and financial cost.

Section 4: Heart of the Nation

If the polling data and the empirical research are neither as fully developed nor as four-square for universal national service as we might hope, the case for universal national service is yet bolstered when placed in its proper historical and cross-national context. Three points are worth emphasizing:

- First, the case is consistent with the American civic tradition—a tradition of bestowing rights along with corresponding duties—trailing all the way back to the Founding Fathers and all the way through the Jacksonian period, the Progressive era, the New Deal, and the 1960’s, right down to at least the early 2010’s. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy famously exhorted, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Although our present national moment might be an exception to the rule, throughout our history, most presidents and other national leaders in both parties have spoken such pro-national service rhetoric, expressed related civic sentiments, and generally supported and celebrated both public and private efforts to translate the words and feelings into actions and initiatives. And concrete initiatives—from FDR’s Civilian Conservation Corps to President George W. Bush’s Freedom Corps—have emerged with policies and resources to support expanded national service.
- Second, there is nothing about either the statutory history or the administrative evolution of the U.S. Selective Service System that forbids reworking it into a conveyor belt for universal national service as contemplated, for example, in the “21st Century National Service System” that, in 2013, was proposed in the Franklin Project “Plan of Action.”
- Third, mandatory national service programs are not at all commonplace in other nations; Americans’ preferences for voluntary over mandatory service is the global norm.

The Franklin Project’s June 2013 “Plan of Action” began as follows:

America needs universal national service—a rite of passage for all young Americans to help solve our nation’s most pressing challenges and bind themselves to one another and the nation. We propose building a comprehensive 21st Century National Service System that challenges all young adults to serve in the country in the military or in civilian national service.⁵¹

Essentially, the Plan of Action envisioned retooling the present U.S. Selective Service System so that in addition to supplying Americans with information on options to serve in one of the five branches of the military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast

Guard) when he or she turns age 18, it could also supply information on a number of civilian national service corps (Education Corps, Conservation Corps, Opportunity Corps, Health and Nutrition Corps, Veterans Corps, International Service Corps, and a Professional Corps).

To take some poetic license, the Franklin Project's Plan of Action called for a new circulatory system to feed and strengthen the heart of the nation. More practically speaking, it called for reforming the U.S. Selective Service System into a robust administrative agent of universal national service, military and civilian, networked in unprecedented but not impossible ways to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and other federal government agencies; and it outlined everything from the Presidential Executive Orders to the types of new technology platforms that would be needed to start and sustain this universal national service system.⁵² Bold as such innovations would be, the history of the U.S. Selective Service System is punctuated by statutory and administrative changes that were bold, often unpopular, for their time.

Service is the heart of the American nation, and, since 1917, the U.S. Selective Service System has been our republic's main civic circulatory system. Although the academic literature on the subject is amazingly thin, the history of how the U.S. Selective Service System evolved is not explicable in terms of the sort of linear program narrative that is most typical in the annals of U.S. public administration.⁵³ Based on a dozen or so sources,⁵⁴ we now turn to sketch system's history, and then to briefly put it into cross-national perspective.

America's "Selective" National Service, Then and Now

1790s-1890s: Early "Selective Service"

In 1792, two separate Militia Acts enacted by the second United States Congress gave authority to the President to call forth the state militias. All able-bodied male citizens between the ages of 18 and 45 were conscripted into a local militia company. Amended in 1795 and then again in 1862, soldiers were to provide themselves with their own weapons and were called upon to serve at the behest of the President. During the War of 1812, President Madison proposed conscripting 40,000 men for the army, but the war ended prior to its being enacted. These are the first examples of "selective service" in the United States.

The first conscription acts were not passed until the Civil War. The Confederacy passed its first conscription acts in April 1862 and the Union followed with The Enrollment Act of March 1863. The act passed by the U.S. Congress called for all males between the ages of 20 and 45 to register. Exemptions could be bought for \$300 or one could find a replacement draftee. Draft dodging, doctor's certifying men as unfit for duty, and other service avoidance activities ensued, resulting, in New York, for example, in riots. Only about 6 to 10 percent of the men selected for the draft in 1863 and 1864 actually served as conscripts, and the remainder either bought their way out of serving or hired a substitute. Overall, nearly 92 percent of the 2,100,000 citizen soldiers of the Union Army

were volunteers.⁵⁵ The Confederacy conscripted only a small number of men and kept raising the age requirements (first to 45 and then 50).

1900s-1940s: Peacetime and Wartime Conscription during the World Wars

After the end of the Civil War, there was no mandatory conscription (draft) of American soldiers until World War I. The Selective Service Act of 1917 (The Act) was signed into law on May 18, 1917. The provisions of the Act included granting the President power to initiate a draft. Although President Woodrow Wilson had pledged to help the Allies in Europe, at the time, the U.S. only had about 100,000 volunteer soldiers. President Wilson issued a Proclamation 10 days following the passage of the Act which implemented the new law.

After the passage of the Selective Service Act of 1917, 10 million men registered during the next few months. It took almost a year after the passage of the Act to get our troops mobilized, trained, and transported. By the end of World War, I, 2.8 million men had been drafted of the 4.8 million who served in the war. Some 24 million men had registered as a part of the Selective Service Act. The Act was used until the end of the war upon which time conscription was dissolved.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was slow to endorse the idea of military conscription prior to World War II. In fact, he had said he was thinking about proposing the compulsory registration of young people ages 19-21 in a program designed to train them in government service non-combatant positions. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, too, endorsed the idea of mandatory one-year training for men and women at age 18 to prepare them for a national emergency. But outside the administration, the plan had few major allies but many cold to hostile critics (not least among the Republican leadership in Congress).

The very first conscription in peacetime was enacted by law in September 1940. The “Burke-Wadsworth” bill was enacted as the Selective Training and Service Act—the STSA. Once it passed, FDR’s plan for a compulsory youth training plan was entirely off the agenda.

The STSA required that all men between the ages of 21 and 36 register for service. One year of service in the armed forces would be required for those chosen by a national lottery.

- By the end of the war, all men between the ages of 18 and 65 years of age would be required to register, and men between 18 and 38 were liable for military service.
- Initially, draft boards were set up across the country to ease the registration of those selected. Numbers 1 through 7,836 were printed on papers which were then placed in capsules in a giant fishbowl.
- Once stirred, the capsules were chosen one by one. In order of selection, the number in a capsule resulted in thousands of men with that number being registered.

- The lottery continued until 1942 before being dissolved in favor of local boards who would select inductees by quota.
- Once the U.S. entered WWII, Congress extended the terms of the Act through the duration of the fighting.
- By the end of the war in 1945, 46 million men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five had registered for the draft and 10 million had been inducted in the military.

When the STSA passed in 1940, polls (such as they were back then) showed that a growing majority of the public was in favor of a “draft.” In 1941, the length of required service was eventually lengthened to 18 months. Initially, only 900,000 men were to be in training at any one time. The provisions of the STSA that governed the World War II draft continued through 1947.

World War II was the first war in which women served in an official capacity. Some 350,000 served in various positions during the war and they had their own branches of the service, e.g., WACS, WASPS, and WAVES. Though mostly employed in traditional office functions, many served at or near the front lines in medical capacities.

Minorities and National Service

African-Americans were initially barred from participating in combat but were later drafted into fighting units. More than 2.5 million African-Americans registered for the draft when World War II began; and 1 million eventually served. They experienced segregation, assignments as laborers, kitchen staff, and the like. The *Pittsburgh Courier* (the nation’s largest black newspaper at the time) waged the Double V campaign, encouraging African-Americans to serve their country bravely and to wage a war against their enemies abroad and the segregationists at home. But there was no reversal on racial segregation during the war, and segregation was the official policy of the armed forces until Harry Truman changed it in 1948.

During the Civil War, there were instances of conscientious objectors being tortured and starved. During World War I, of the 450 conscientious objectors who were found guilty at military hearings, only three served less than three years in prison. All of the rest endured more severe punishment or death. Under the STSA, provisions were officially made for conscientious objectors (C.Os). Some 72,000 men who registered for the draft applied for conscientious objector status during World War II. Out of this group, there were about 25,000 who performed some sort of non-combatant army service. A program designed to accommodate the C.Os called the Civilian Public Service (CPS) employed 12,000. The CPS work was organized into camps with some run by the government and others run by historic churches of peace (Quakers and others). The work was supposed to be of great national importance. Those who worked in the CPS were often exposed to risky situations such as firefighting, exposure to scientific research on disease and infections, etc. In consultation with the National Service Board of Religious Objectors (NSBRO), the Selective Service authorities approved the “work of national importance”

to be performed by the C.Os Several federal agencies were integral to the CPS; for example, of 67 CPS base camps, 30 were operated by the U.S. Forest Service, and 19 were run by the Soil Conservation Service.

1948-1973: The Beginning of Modern Selective Service

The STSA expired in 1947. The next year, the “Elston” bill became the Military Selective Service Act, or Selective Service Act of 1948. That Act established the current structure of the U.S. Selective Service System. It required all males between the ages of 19 and 26 be eligible to be drafted for a service requirement of 21 months. This was followed by a commitment for either 12 consecutive months of active service or 36 consecutive months of service in the reserves, with a statutory term of military service set at a minimum of five years total.

During this time period, there were enough volunteers to limit the need for the draft, and the Selective Service System unofficially disbanded inductions for a short time in 1949. However, in 1950, with the outbreak of the Korean War, Congress extended the Military Selective Service Act and ordered 600,000 inductions starting in late 1950. The following year, Congress enacted the Universal Military Training and Service Act (UMTSA). It required all men 18-26 to register for the draft. During the Korean War, some 1.5 million men were conscripted for service. Another 1.5 million men were inducted from 1954 through 1961. The UMTSA also increased service from 21 to 24 months and set the limit for military individual reserve duty to a minimum of 8 years. Full-time college students or those in other training programs could request exemption from duty. If granted, the exemption was extended for as long as the person was a student or trainee.

In 1963, President Johnson announced that the Pentagon would conduct a study of the military draft. During that time, there was a minor movement for “compulsory national service” in conjunction with an “all-volunteer military service.”

In 1968, GOP presidential candidate Richard Nixon promised he would reinstitute the all-volunteer force. In 1970, President Nixon established the Gates Commission to advise him on the transition to an all-volunteer military.

1973-Present: Selective Service Today

Under Title 50 United States Code Chapter 49, no American has been drafted since 1973. From 1948 to 1973, men were drafted into vacant positions in the armed forces during periods of military conflict as well as during peacetime. Once the U.S. Selective Service System’s induction authority expired in 1973, the agency still remained in a standby posture to support the volunteer force should the authority be granted to resume inductions. Registrations were discontinued in 1975 but were resumed in 1980. Since that time, all men had to register within 30 days of their 18th birthday. This system continues today. Essentially, the System’s present administrative structure consists of a National Headquarters, a Data Management Center, and three Regional Headquarters.

State and local offices were closed in 1976 and would be reactivated only if inductions were to be resumed.⁵⁶

The U.S. Selective Service System identifies certain situations that warrant a postponement, deferment, or exemption from military service. During an actual draft, persons in high school and college may postpone their induction under certain circumstances. High School students may postpone their induction until they graduate or reach age 20, whichever comes first. A college student may postpone until the end of the current academic year if they are in their last year or the end of the current semester. A delay is instituted for a person if a request for reclassification is submitted. A serious illness or death in the immediate family will qualify one for a postponement as well. Once a request for postponement has been submitted, a delay of registration is in effect until the request for postponement or reclassification has been processed. All persons who submit such claims will be expected to provide upon request supporting material.

If the draft is authorized by Congress, all registrants are assumed to be available for service (or “1-A”) unless they are determined by the Military Entrance Processing Station to be ineligible for service or one of the following classifications is in place:

- (1) Conscientious objectors perform service to the nation in a manner consistent with their moral, ethical or religious opposition to participation in war in any form. Depending upon the nature of his beliefs, a conscientious objector serves either in a noncombatant capacity in the armed forces or in a civilian job contributing to the national interest.
- (2) Surviving sons or brothers in a family where the parent or sibling died as a result of U.S. military service or is in a captured or missing in action status are exempt from service in peacetime.
- (3) Hardship deferments are available for men whose induction would result in hardship to persons who depend upon them for support.
- (4) Members of Reserve components (including the National Guard and advanced level ROTC cadets who have already signed a Reserve contract) are eligible for a separate classification and perform their military service in the National Guard or the Reserves.
- (5) Ministers are exempted from service.
- (6) Ministerial students are deferred from service until they complete their studies.
- (7) Certain elected officials are exempt from service as long as they continue to hold office.
- (8) Veterans generally are exempt from service in peacetime.
- (9) Immigrants and dual nationals in some cases may be exempt from U.S. military service depending upon their place of residence and country of citizenship.

American National Service in Global Perspective

In 2003, Amanda Moore McBride and her colleagues at the University of Washington-St. Louis published a little-noticed (then and since) study in which they reported on the

results of a comprehensive analysis of national service programs all across the globe. Using a standardized definition of “national service” that excluded species of “service” programs that were least likely to involve “compulsory” or “mandatory” elements, and that also excluded the impossibly mixed bag of “service-learning” programs, they identified and examined 210 programs in all.⁵⁷

In the McBride, et al. study, only about 4 percent of the programs involved any “mandatory” or “compulsory” components or features. However, in a paper published for years later as the concluding chapter of an edited volume that examined service programs worldwide, including in-depth case studies of service programs in nations (including Chile, Israel, Nigeria, and others), McBride and her colleagues cited some evidence indicating that “mandatory national service may eventually fade away” and other evidence indicating that “mandatory service-learning programs” were “on the rise” globally;⁵⁸ but there then were no new datasets to update the 2003 study, and none have appeared since.

The first Appendix below is a table that compiles information about scores of nations’ respective policies on “Military Service Age and Obligation;” and the second Appendix below offers a series of brief vignettes on “alternative civilian service” policies in each of seven different nations that, together, pretty much sample the range of such policies worldwide.

In conclusion, on the one hand, it takes no leap of imagination to envision the next chapters in the history of the U.S. Selective Service System, and the next innovations and amendments to System’s present administrative structure, mirroring the “21st Century National Service System” articulated in 2013 by the Franklin Project. But, on the other hand, this new system, and any mandatory service components, would have no twins and few close cousins around the globe. It would, however, reflect the American civic tradition, starting with the unprecedented and wholly novel creation of a government based on “reflection and choice” that is “neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both.”⁵⁹

Section 5: Mandatory National Service’s “Zone of Constitutionality”

In a 2013 article in *The Atlantic* entitled “The Case Against Universal National Service,” Conor Friedersdorf opposed General Stanley McChrystal and other Franklin Project members (ourselves included) who had advocated that every young adult American be required by law to do national service for one or two years.⁶⁰ Friedersdorf’s dozen counter-arguments included the claim that mandatory national service would “coerce” young adults “to wed and procreate early.”⁶¹ But he also cited the single most widely

invoked argument against the idea; namely, that “compulsory national service would violate the 13th Amendment” by constituting “involuntary servitude.”⁶²

Not so. There is a mandatory national service zone of constitutionality that we outline in more detail in Appendix 2.

Franklin Plan Falls Within Zone of Constitutionality

It is probable that the “universal national service” plan proposed by the Franklin Project—serve in one of the five branches of the Armed Services or in one of seven national service corps—would fall easily within this “zone of constitutionality.”

Over the last quarter century, many advocates of mandatory national service have emphasized the pro-social and pro-civic benefits of “service.” Put aside for now questions regarding how, whether, or to what extent the evidence regarding non-mandatory (and in many cases all-volunteer and wholly private) service is germane to any given species of mandatory national service; and, for now, side-step questions about that evidence and extant benefit-cost analyses of non-mandatory service programs (or revisit Section 3 above if you must).

Instead, recognize that even judges willing to take such pro-service arguments and evidence at face value, and even jurists ready to stipulate that massive and positive social and civic benefits flow from such programs, are unlikely to attach much importance to a given program’s real or perceived pro-social and pro-civic benefits when deciding whether it violates the 13th Amendment’s prohibition on “involuntary servitude.”

Rather, the courts have hitherto focused far more on the nature of the work itself—the amount of work required, the conditions under which the work is to be performed, and so forth. The federal judiciary has long recognized that national defense against foreign enemies and combatants is a core and compelling state interest. By the same token, federal judges have recognized that military service may require an individual, whether conscripted or recruited, to do work that is extremely demanding, dangerous, and discomfiting, up to and including risking loss of life.

With respect to non-military service mandates, however, the court have yet to sort out the conditions, if any, under which mandated civilian service that involves more than incidental or trivial work-related hardships (for example, a government-subsidized program assigning a mild asthmatic to his or her “second choice” city for a job that exposes him or her to marginally greater air pollution) passes constitutional muster.

On the one hand, while mandatory civilian national service remains a type of labor distinct from the labor the amendment was ratified to prevent, and while mandatory, non-military service still does not fit neatly into any of the specifically constitutional categories the Court has utilized in its 13th Amendment jurisprudence.

On the other hand, mandatory national service so structured as to avoid unduly burdening the citizen with work that is unreasonably demanding, dangerous, and discomfiting, that wantonly deprives the citizen-conscript of his or her otherwise protected and freely enjoyed civil rights and civil liberties, offers job options and choices, and is dedicated to a critical public purpose, would likely prove constitutional.

Many long-time advocates of mandatory national service are fond of structuring the programs such that the receipt of certain future government benefits that one would otherwise receive as an entitlement contingent become instead contingent on performing the required service. For example, in a 2012 op-ed entitled “Let’s Draft Our Kids,” Thomas E. Ricks endorsed a mandatory national service plan defined by two options: citizen-conscripts could serve either in the Armed Service or perform civilian service longer and for less pay; and each could “opt out” at the price of foregoing certain future public benefits: “Those who declined to help Uncle Sam would in return ask nothing from him—no Medicare, no subsidized college loans and no mortgage guarantees. Those who want minimal government,” he vented, “can have it.”⁶³

There are multiple and competing views regarding whether such an earn-your-entitlements approach would fall within the zone of constitutionality. It is possible that they might; but, by analogy, certain proponents of government funding “faith-based” organizations to supply health and human services have mistakenly assumed that channeling the tax dollars through individual vouchers side-steps or eliminates all or most constitutional difficulties.⁶⁴ Proponents of “opt out” plans for mandatory national service might likewise prove mistaken in assuming that if the mandate is manifested mainly as a condition for the citizen-conscript to avoid losing other government-supplied or government-subsidized benefits (permitting him or her to skip service at the price of foregoing future supports or subsidies), then the program is bound to be constitutionally kosher.

In short, different types of mandatory national service programs might or might not fall easily within the zone of constitutionality. In some cases, the compromises in program character required to make a given favorite mandatory national service plan (age cohort, time requirements, administrative and financial particulars, and so forth) that might make the plan certain to pass constitutional muster—are not compromises that pro-mandatory service advocates are willing to make.

Section 6: Closing the National Service Gap

Mandatory national service, though constitutionally feasible, administratively workable, and, in the context of present-day federal budgets, hardly a top-fifty budget-buster, is politically impossible, at least for as far into the future as our combined 120-year-old eyes can see.

In our view, the centerpiece of any universal voluntary national service recommendations should be the mobilization of young people into full-time, full-year service opportunities; the linkage of military and civilian national service; support for communities that commit to make a year of service a common expectation and opportunity; and federal funding measures to close the 35-year-old national service gap that over the last quarter-century has turned away millions of Americans who wanted to serve their country via AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, and other programs.

We prescribe policy proposals that will ensure that:⁶⁵

- ✓ **Everyone** has the opportunity to serve;
- ✓ National service **brings together youth of different backgrounds** in common purpose;
- ✓ Everyone can **choose** how to serve their country, whether civilian or military;
- ✓ Full-time national service is **rewarded** with increased opportunity;
- ✓ Private resources are **leveraged** and communities are engaged;
- ✓ **Communities** lead to ensure that local priorities are honored; and
- ✓ The **infrastructure builds on** existing federal, state, and local efforts with significant funding at all levels of government.

Specifically, we prescribe the following policy proposals to provide full, one-year or more service opportunities to all qualified young adult and other applicants to AmeriCorps and other federally-supported service programs:

- ✓ **Dramatically increase the number of new national service opportunities**, starting with a short-term goal of increasing the number of service years in civilian national service to 200,000 to match the number of people who enter the military each year. We support increasing such opportunities to 1 million by July 4, 2026 – the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to honor Jefferson’s notion of citizen engagement and the public happiness;
- ✓ **Link military and civilian national service** as two sides of the same coin and provide information on military and civilian national service to all 18-28-year-old men and women;

- ✓ **Invest in local communities** and drive resources to communities that raise their hands and agree to test the power of national service to solve problems, change lives, and transform their communities;
- ✓ **Link national service to college access** by making the education award equivalent to the full cost of a year of public education in a corps member's home state for every year of national service performed by the corps member;
- ✓ **Recognize national service as a “civic apprenticeship”** that prepares young people for the workforce and a life of active citizenship, and connects national service to credentials with value in the employment marketplace, including by granting noncompetitive eligibility to everyone who completes at least one year of service;
- ✓ **Establish Federal and State agency corps** by calling on federal agencies to develop civilian national service opportunities that strategically advance their missions and build their workforce pipelines, and by providing incentives for states to do the same;⁶⁶
- ✓ **Democratize national service opportunities through Service Year Fellowships, which would unleash civil societies for national service** by recognizing systems to certify positions created by colleges and universities, nonprofits, and faith-based institutions that are not provided federal funding for national service positions and enable their equitable participation in a universal national service system;⁶⁷
- ✓ **Strengthen the GI Bill** to permit veterans to use a portion of their existing benefits to perform up to a year of civilian national service to help address problems in communities and improve the transitions of veterans back home;⁶⁸
- ✓ **Expand existing national and international service programs** by fully implementing the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which authorizes 250,000 AmeriCorps positions annually and establishes various corps to address public challenges; making YouthBuild positions available to meet demand; fully implementing the recently enacted 21st Century Conservation Service Corps legislation; and fulfilling the promise of international service by expanding the Peace Corps, Volunteers for Prosperity, and Global Service Fellowships to a total of 100,000 international service positions annually;⁶⁹
- ✓ **Expand the traditional appropriations process** and identify non-traditional funding sources, such as a voluntary tax contribution option for federal taxpayers to remind all Americans of their opportunity and duty to serve their nation;⁷⁰ and
- ✓ **Ask local, state and national leaders to issue calls to service** to remind young Americans that with rights come responsibilities, and that service can heal divides, solve public challenges, and promote skills relevant to the workforce and a lifetime of civic engagement. Research shows that being asked to serve is a major reason for doing so.

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NOTES

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- ² For example, see J.Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1997), and J. Decety and W. Ickes, eds., *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).
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- ⁵ C. Belfield, *The Economic Value of National Service*, Franklin Project and Civic Enterprises in association with Voices for National Service, September 2013.
- ⁶ Portions of the remaining sections of this paper are adapted in part from J.M. Bridgeland, S. McChrystal, R. Gates, C. Rice and S. Hadley, Testimony before the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service, June 17, 2019; internal briefing memos on national service prepared by J.J. DiIulio, Jr. for Civic Enterprises, LLC, in 2016 and 2017; and selected papers on the topic commissioned by Civic Enterprises, LLC over the last decade. The co-authors also wish to acknowledge and thank Professor Donald F. Kettl for his help in searching for reliable data on the gap between the number of applications to federal government-supported national service programs and the number of positions available in these programs.
- ⁷ See also the *21st Century National Service System Plan of Action*, The Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute, where the authors played a leading role, together with General Stanley McChrystal and Alan Khazei in drafting this plan and articulating the case for national service. The plan was signed by leaders from all sectors and political affiliations across America and has strong bipartisan support.
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- ¹⁷ Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni Association, “Roosevelt’s Tree Army. A Brief History of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” <http://www.justinmuseum.com/cchistory/treearmy.html>.
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- ¹⁹ R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
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- ²³ Ibid.
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- ²⁶ Atwell et al., op. cit.
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- ²⁸ J.Q. Wilson et al, *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 16th edition (Boston, MA: Cengage, 2019), pp. 171 and 181.
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<http://www.pbs.org/pov/soldiersofconscience/background/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/history/selective-service.html>

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<http://uscode.house.gov/editorialreclassification/t50a-elim/index.html>

<https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/lottery1>

⁵⁵ See: Chambers II, John Whiteclay, *To Raise an Army, The Draft Comes to Modern America*, New York, 1987, p. 42-63

⁵⁶ Per the administrative law governing these procedures: In the event of a mobilization, Selective Service Reserve Forces Officers would be called to active duty to establish State Headquarters and Area Offices at predetermined locations, and at the same time the Local and Appeal Boards would be activated. A lottery drawing would be conducted to determine the order in which men would be called, and induction orders would be issued, in lottery number order, by means of the U.S. Postal Service. The first priority group would consist of men in the calendar year of their 20th birthday. Registrants receiving induction orders would either report to the Military Entrance Processing Station for examination and possible immediate induction, or file a claim for postponement, deferment or exemption from military service. Such claims would be considered by the Area Office or the Local Board, depending on the nature of the claim. Agency mobilization plans are designed to meet the needs of the Department of Defense.

⁵⁷ A.M. McBride et al., *CDS Report: The Forms and Nature of Civic Service: A Global Assessment*, Center for Social Development, Washington University-St. Louis, 2003.

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⁶⁶ Since 9/11, both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administrations looked at the opportunities to expand national service within existing departments and agencies of the federal government, often performing public missions at lower cost to taxpayers. A Medical Reserve Corps, FEMA Corps and School Turnaround Corps were all created through domestic agencies and a Volunteers for Prosperity, working on HIV/AIDS and malaria, was created through U.S. AID. The Service Year Alliance worked with the Governor of Iowa to issue an executive order instructing state departments and agencies to use existing resources more efficiently to create the Iowa Reading Corps, Iowa Energy Corps and other such efforts to solve public problems in the state with civilian national service.

⁶⁷ In his February 1961 memo to President Kennedy on the establishment of the Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver outlined various options. He envisioned running national service through colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations and agencies at all levels of government. The civic infrastructure to achieve that vision in 1961 did not exist; today it does. Taking that vision forward, the Service Year Alliance has created a technology platform, ServiceYear.org. It enables tens of thousands of national service opportunities to be posted online to connect with young people whose profiles match interest in those positions. Such national service programs are certified if they meet these criteria, among others: engages one or more corps members in direct service or indirect “capacity building” for direct service programs at least 32 hours per week over the course of 9 to 24 months total; addresses unmet community needs and specifies intended outcomes; provides a monthly living allowance; provides ongoing training, supervision and mentoring to corps members to build their skills and opportunities, increase their ability to provide quality service, and ensure they benefit from their service experience; and identifies specific skills, certifications, and other learning outcomes that corps members will attain through the program. Colleges and universities, nonprofit and faith-based institutions, and other organizations are creating new national service positions and becoming certified national service organizations through this system.

⁶⁸ Research shows that civilian service is a tested strategy for successful reintegration of veterans, and veterans have a strong desire to serve at home; see J. Bridgeland, J., and M.M. Yonkman. *All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service* (Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises, 2009)

⁶⁹ President John F. Kennedy envisioned that the Peace Corps “would be truly serious” when a 100,000 Americans were serving every year, and 1 million over a decade. He believed such service would have a dramatic impact on America’s foreign policy, national security and place in the world. The only large-scale nationally representative survey of 11,000 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers from 1961 through 2010 shows that President Kennedy’s vision for the Peace Corps was shared by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, who believe it had a significant impact on national security and peace-building. *See* J.M. Bridgeland et al., *A Call to Peace: Perspectives of Volunteers on the Peace Corps at 50* (Civic Enterprises, National Peace Corps Association, and Hart Research Associates: September 2011).

⁷⁰ In addition to providing sufficient appropriations to bring national service to scale, governments and the private sector can support national service growth through nontraditional funding. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia operate state lotteries, and a portion of most of these lotteries goes to support state programs in education, environmental protection, crime control, and more. State policymakers should explore opportunities to dedicate a portion of these lottery funds to support national service positions to help address their state and local challenges. Additionally, 41 states give residents the ability to donate added funds when they pay their taxes to support specific programs. States should create a voluntary tax contribution option to provide additional support to national service programs.