

Principles and Reforms

The Administration will work closely with the Congress to reform and enhance national and community service programs for five years, consistent with the following principles and reforms for a Citizen Service Act:

1. Support and encourage greater engagement of citizens in volunteering.

President Bush is proposing to reform and enhance national and community service programs to increase the quantity and quality of service opportunities for Americans by:

- Generating more volunteers for each government dollar spent by making volunteer mobilization and program sustainability explicit criteria for grants to service organizations.
- Providing more incentives for seniors' participation in AmeriCorps by permitting them to earn education awards that can be transferred to their children, grandchildren, or another individual in need.
- Improving education awards by working with the Congress to eliminate their taxability, adjust them for inflation, provide greater flexibility on eligible schools and loans, and test new uses for the awards.
- Testing, on a pilot basis, approaches that will allow individuals more choice in where they volunteer.
- Lowering the age for participation in Senior Corps programs from 60 to 55 and eliminating income tests as a criterion for participation in the programs so vital needs are met.
- Providing a stronger challenge grant fund to encourage private support of community-based service organizations.
- Working with the Congress to require that at least 50 percent of Federal Work-Study funds be devoted to community service so that hundreds of thousands of additional students will serve an average of 10 hours a week in community-serving organizations.
- Eliminating barriers to participation in service programs by Americans with disabilities.

2. Make Federal funds more responsive to state and local needs.

President Bush is proposing to give state, local and community officials more authority and flexibility to provide service opportunities to the citizens they represent by:

- Giving states more authority to select AmeriCorps programs, unlike current law that requires states to compete at the national level for over half of their funds.
- Easing the administrative burden on states and local communities and providing greater flexibility in the use of funds.
- Permitting AmeriCorps members to work with community organizations on capacity-building activities, such as working to recruit and manage additional volunteers for various projects.

3. Make Federal support more accountable and effective.

President Bush supports investing in opportunities that will produce results for the communities they serve. To create greater accountability for results, the President supports reforms that will ensure:

- All grantees in AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America programs will have specific program objectives and accountability requirements. The Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service should be given statutory authority to: (1) work with grantees to establish performance measures; (2) require corrective plans for those not meeting goals; and (3) reduce or terminate grants if corrections are not made.
- The average cost per participant will be lowered by providing adequate opportunities for part-time members, and members who receive partial living allowances or education benefits only. Total costs for AmeriCorps participants will be contained by establishing a statutory cap for the average cost of full-time equivalents. Such a cap will ensure that Federal resources open up more service opportunities to more Americans.

4. Provide greater assistance to secular and faith-based community organizations.

President Bush is proposing to include more community- and faith-based organizations in more national and community service programs through the following reforms:

- Strengthen and reform AmeriCorps*VISTA, which has a long history of working closely with local community and faith-based organizations on anti-poverty efforts, by providing greater flexibility and local control in its administration.
- Test, on a pilot basis, allowing individuals choose the organizations they wish to serve with from among a variety of options, including smaller community and faith-based organizations.