

MONTANA STATE SERVICE PLAN 2006

The Montana State Service Plan seeks to incorporate all aspects of community service in a rural state where resources are limited. We believe that Montana is truly “The last best place” due in large part to the ethic of service and volunteerism that abounds.

The Montana Commission’s current partnerships with other Corporation for National and Community Service programs, the Governor’s Office, the disability community and countless community based organizations focused on providing rural programming around issues such as at risk youth, are thriving. These collaborative efforts have had a strong impact in our efforts to increase volunteerism among students, senior citizens and baby boomers.

Over the next three years, we plan to place additional attention on underserved rural geographic areas in addition to collaborating with the Governor’s Office on an exciting new initiative that will aim to increase volunteer numbers among members of the disability community, at risk youth and baby boomers in addition to all Montanans.

SPECIFIC PROGRAMMATIC FOCUS AREAS

The Montana Commission as an active partner with the Governor’s office, the state office of National & Community Service and the Office of Public Instruction seeks to increase the level of volunteerism by providing unique and meaningful opportunities to all individuals with an emphasis on the “baby boomer” generation. Already in place are programs that have been proven successful such as Campus Compact working with Alumni in this age group, Foster Grandparents, and RSVP in schools to facilitate service learning opportunities. The Montana Commission will move forward in spring 2007 with the goal of increasing volunteerism among “baby boomers” with an exciting new program. The Governor, Lt. Governor and other statewide leaders will be on the air in Montana, targeting this age group with the start up of “Volunteer Montana”. This will be the catalyst for volunteerism and community service. It is the desire of the Commission to connect volunteer centers, community organizations, local business and churches to increase statewide volunteerism. There will be an active effort on behalf of the Montana Commission to engage corporations and state government in this effort. Montana is a rural state where good community service work is successful because of partnerships and collaboration with state government, corporations, schools and non-profit organizations. This effort with a popular Governor will help mobilize more volunteers to benefit community-based organizations. In the fall of 2005 we helped organize The Warm Hearts for Warm Homes initiative on behalf of Governor Brian Schweitzer, including forging a new partnership between the Montana Conservation Corps, the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, and local Human Resources Development Councils, which resulted in the weatherization of nearly 600 homes across the state. This partnership will be expanded in 2006 to reach approximately 2100 more homes with an even greater impact on energy conservation and heating bills. In collaboration with

Northwestern Energy we were able to secure funding in the amount of \$50,000 granted to the Montana Conservation Corps to assist in providing materials and labor to complete home weatherization assistance. Volunteer recruitment for this program in 2006 will have a track that will include individuals with disabilities in a neighbor helping neighbor effort with an emphasis on Montana Reservations.

The “baby boomers” are part of a target group to help in the Bone Marrow Registry and the Northwest Life Center Organ Donor Program. Last year a local RSVP assisted in a very successful effort at a local health clinic to register bone marrow volunteers. The Montana Office of Community Service has been given the responsibility to lead the efforts on the organ donor registry by Governor Brian Schweitzer and has received state funds to provide education and outreach. The Governors office has also selected the Montana Commission to lead the Civil Rights Advisory Council. The council has a mission to involve all Montana citizens in efforts to promote and welcome diversity, encourage education, ceremonies and community service to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, and advise the Governor on policy issues of inclusivity and civil rights. There will be a statewide celebration of Dr. King’s life organized by the AmeriCorps Advisory Council, and members of the Civil Rights Advisory Council.

ONGOING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AND SPECIAL INITIATIVES

In partnership with the Montana Campus Compact, the Office of Public Instruction, the CNCS State Office, various state agencies and community-based organizations, the Montana Commission has identified disadvantage youth as a statewide initiative. A newly developed partnership with Jobs for Montana’s Graduates (JMG), a program aimed at supporting disadvantaged youth by using community service to remove barriers to stay in school and acquire the academic, personal and leadership skills necessary to become successful, productive members of their community, will begin operating an AmeriCorps program this fall. JMG’s will work with volunteers in community service organizations to identify teachers that will include in their school curriculum work readiness skills, form a career association for students, and have a employer marketing and job development track. They will also be identifying students at risk, and disadvantaged with disabilities. JMG has a four-year curriculum built on 37 work-based competencies. Last year JMG partnered with the Montana National Guard to assist high school dropouts enrolled in the Montana Youth Challenge Program, to gain their GED and successfully transition to meaningful careers. This program is associated with the national program, Jobs for America’s Graduates, the nation’s longest-running, most consistently applied school-to-work transition model. JMG will have an active partnership between state government, labor, business, and community organizations. Students actively engaged in community service will become the next generation instilled with a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement. The addition of an education award will provide modest funds for the next step in career planning in the form of college or trade school education.

Existing commission programs also provided critical services to disadvantaged youth in the state. The Montana Campus Corps program currently mentors youth of incarcerated parents; the TechCorps Connects program bridges the “digital divide” and as part of its activities provides opportunities for youth to access computers and receive technology training to those who have limited access; the Literacy Support Corps program increases parent's opportunities and abilities to support their children's education by planning and facilitating literacy-based parent-child learning activities to prevent poor attendance in school and decreased achievement for their children; and the Montana Conservation Corps is successful in the “Montana Yes” Program, Youth Engaged in Service. Youth Engaged in Service provides an outdoor experience that takes youths at risk and provides a unique learning atmosphere. Members are given life-training skills and develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

In the next year there will be an active recruitment in program activity to increase service learning opportunities. Montana Learn & Serve currently uses academic achievement, school drop out rates and discipline problems to connect volunteers with community mentors.

Learn and Serve has fostered the effort to mentor youth in various models. The CPTYL (Citizen Preparedness Through Youth Leadership) has given disadvantaged youth a sense of community by providing youth-lead projects with direct ties to school curriculum. CPTYL will be developing a best practices manual that can be replicated by other schools. A major factor of success with this model is a community or a community organization willing to let youth lead and who value the contributions of youth. When community leaders in partnerships acknowledge that K-12 youth are often more skilled in certain areas (technology for example) than adults, young people build self-esteem from that affirmation. Learn & Serve has partnered with the University of Montana Division of Education Research Services and has three major service areas helping identified disadvantage youth. These areas, Disaster Preparedness, Community Safety and Conflict Resolution are life skills. Any society improves when its disadvantaged youth gain skills to become leaders in their community.

All programs seek to create an atmosphere where individuals with disabilities are included and welcomed. The Montana Commission on Community Service values diversity and promotes inclusion at all levels. Programs are continually encouraged to provide inclusive service environments with on-going support, resources and disability inclusion training. The Commission supports the role of the Disability Coordinator to maximize the number of individuals with disabilities engaged in volunteerism.

Programs of the state office of CNCS, the Montana Commission on Community Service and Learn & Serve will be working toward increasing the number of volunteers in each community across the state. It is our hope to continue to be at the top of the nation in the spirit of volunteerism.

The Montana Office of Community Service currently provides excellent training for AmeriCorps, Learn & Serve and AmeriCorps/* Vista members. This cross-stream effort

between the state office of CNCS, Learn & Serve and OCS has produced a model for other entities. Community Building Institute offers members a wide range of skills to work with project supervisors in this most successful model. The All Member Gathering also provides cross-stream training, statewide media to encourage member recruitment, and networking opportunities for programs and members. The All Member Gathering also creates the opportunity for programs, members, and commissioners to meet and recognize state leaders during a legislative session. The Governor supports and encourages the partnership between community service and government with full state funding as a National Corporation match for the Montana Commission.

The Montana Commission has recently formed a Foundation. The foundation will primarily be a fundraising organization utilizing its funds to support the Montana Community Service Commission in serving its own charitable and educational purposes.

The Office of Community Service is also involved in the Governor's Conversation on Endowments and Philanthropy. This event brings together foundations, individual donors, and statewide leaders to look for solutions around the lack of national funding in Montana. Started ten years ago, the Governor's Task Force created the Endowment Tax Credit. The current conversation has a goal of bridging the Philanthropic Divide. The Philanthropic Divide is the term for the ten states that receive the least amount of national support from foundations. The Montana Office of Community Service will be working with nine other state commissions to find creative ways to work with national funders to highlight the work of non-profits in Montana. These are the same non-profits that play a very important role in the infrastructure of our National Corporation sub-grantees.

The Montana Commission will be organizing the Governor's Conference on Volunteerism and Civic Engagement this year with the recruitment and retention of volunteers as a primary focus.

The Montana Commission had pledged to continue the tradition of the Presidential Freedom Scholarships by committing to raise the necessary funds to meet a match provided by a local business partner. This program, started by the Corporation, will be an in-house project to continue educational awards for high schools students engaged in community service.

NON-MONETARY SUPPORT FOR STATE SERVICE PLAN

The Corporation has helped advance the goals of the Montana Community Service Commission with assistance in retreat planning, Commissioner training, new Executive Director training, availability of specific trainers to answer questions, a national conference with training and networking opportunities and direction on long range planning incorporating the Corporations Strategic Plan. The availability of any type of assistance is on the web site, and there are great mentoring opportunities. The Montana Commission appreciates the responsiveness of CNCS technical assistance. If after the review of this plan CNCS identifies any assistance that would enhance our above efforts, we ask that our program officer get in touch with us. We look forward to a continuation of our solid working relationship with CNCS.