

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

# *Strategic Plan*

2006-2010

*Improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering*



# MOBILIZING *more* VOLUNTEERS



As the echoes of the September 11 attacks were ringing in our ears, President Bush issued his call to service in early 2002. Between then and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina four years later, the number of people volunteering in communities has increased from 59 million Americans to 65.4 million.<sup>4</sup>

For those of us interested in engaging citizens of all ages and backgrounds, including those with disabilities, and strengthening our democracy, this growth in the number of Americans volunteering represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to sustain a significant upsurge in citizen engagement. This initiative is about increasing the level of individual engagement in volunteer activities and building the infrastructure of nonprofits and communities to create more volunteer opportunities, and to respond to significant community challenges through citizen mobilization.

Together with our partners, including volunteer and service-driven organizations across the country, the Corporation is committed to working toward a national goal of expanding the number of Americans who volunteer by more than 15 percent over five years, from 65.4 million to 75 million Americans. We also want to encourage volunteers to contribute more hours to their communities. As part of that effort, we are encouraging more Americans to consider making volunteering part of their regular activities. This effort will allow volunteers to gain a wealth of knowledge and enhance their individual skills through their service experience. With those increased skills, volunteers can be a tremendous asset to organizations, helping to increase long-term capacity in communities. For example, Michelle Ward, an AmeriCorps\*NCCC alumna who

studies economics and international business, applied skills learned from her service when she began work with the embassy in Togo for the U.S. State Department. The emergency management work she was a part of while fighting wildfires with AmeriCorps\*NCCC came in handy when a political coup occurred in Togo. She became responsible for evacuation efforts and setting up shelters.

Research conducted by the Corporation and others in recent years shows that increasing the level of individual engagement in volunteer activities requires significant recruitment, but it also requires much more. Meeting the demand of individuals wanting to volunteer requires building and sustaining capacity and infrastructure within nonprofit organizations and communities to support those volunteers, to match them with appropriate and meaningful opportunities, to train them to succeed, and to manage and reward their work.

The same research that recognized America's volunteer force as 65.4 million strong also identified millions of other Americans with a history of volunteering. These former volunteers indicated they had not volunteered recently due to a variety of obstacles, including lack of time, lack of information, family responsibilities, transportation issues, and health or medical issues. As we move forward, our challenge will be to focus simultaneously on reaching out to more Americans of all ages and backgrounds to volunteer and, at the same time, to ensure that volunteers' needs are fulfilled.

Corporation programs have a strong history of invigorating and supporting community volunteers. We promote service for young people to gain valuable

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*We are committed to expanding the number of Americans who volunteer from 65.4 million to 75 million Americans.*

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skills for work and school, for older Americans to stay active and healthy, and for people of all ages to broaden their service experience. Our Learn and Serve America programs introduce over a million children and youth every year to the excitement of meeting community needs, and put them on the path to a lifetime of service. Our AmeriCorps members recruit, train, and supervise more than 800,000 community volunteers each year. Our Senior Corps programs, with more than 500,000 participants, set the standard for experienced volunteers in thousands of communities across America. And our research shows that participants in Corporation programs leave the programs more likely to remain engaged in their communities for years to come, as well as enter into public service careers.

In addition, when nonprofit organizations were asked about what they most need in order to build an infrastructure solid enough to support greater volunteering, a common response was a dedicated, stipended volunteer (someone like an AmeriCorps member, a VISTA member, or a Senior Corps volunteer) to manage the other volunteers and support organizational capacity-building.<sup>5</sup>

The Corporation is committed to improving the capacity of organizations and strengthening their infrastructure to effectively engage volunteers by making volunteer recruitment and management a more central focus. In order to do this, we will engage more participants in our programs as volunteer coordinators, and we will also strengthen relationships with community volunteer connector organizations (such as volunteer centers). These organizations are also dedicated to meeting the needs of volunteers and nonprofit groups; they match individuals with appropriate service opportunities and train nonprofit organizations to deepen the engagement of individual participants.

Building on the success from the President's call to service, our efforts over the coming years will focus on six major areas:

### AmeriCorps\*VISTA Making a Difference for People with Disabilities

**T**he Program: For more than 200 people in and around Ann Arbor, Michigan, help with tasks ranging from home repair to transportation is merely a phone call away, as long as the phone call is to the Washtenaw Talent Exchange. Participants in the Exchange register their requests with one of the four AmeriCorps\*VISTA members running the year-old program of the Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living. The AmeriCorps\*VISTA members then match the request for any one of about 300 tasks with the skills offered by participants. As Exchange participants join the service, they indicate what skills they can offer fellow participants. The Exchange participant who performs a task receives one service credit, called a Talent Share, for every hour spent in completing the assignment. In turn, that participant can use those shares for other services.

**W**hy It Works: Most participants in the Exchange, like the AmeriCorps\*VISTA members who run the program, are disabled. Joining the Exchange gives them a chance to use their skills—and teach them to others—while receiving help in areas where they might need some assistance, or like to learn. At the same time, the Exchange reduces the isolation that people with disabilities often experience.

Source: *National Service News 2005*

- » Increasing volunteer recruitment, training, and support by AmeriCorps and Senior Corps;
- » Ensuring that AmeriCorps\*State and National and VISTA extensively support the spectrum of community volunteer connector organizations;
- » Utilizing participants in national service programs to provide volunteer coordination and management support for organizations, especially smaller organizations that rely on volunteers;
- » Ensuring organizations are partnering with faith-based and other community organizations to help meet community needs;
- » Building the capacity of local communities to organize citizens to respond effectively to disasters; and
- » Using our national platform to recognize volunteers.

*“Opening the door to civic engagement and responsible citizenship, and getting as many Americans through it as possible so that it becomes a long-lasting phenomenon, is the job of all of us who care about engaging our citizens and strengthening our democracy and our communities.”*

David Eisner, CEO

Corporation for National and Community Service

The Corporation views disaster preparedness and response as a priority that directly supports this initiative. While volunteers and voluntary associations have always been an integral aspect of how the United States responds to disasters, the September 11 tragedy, as well as the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, indicate a renewed commitment Americans have made to rebuilding lives and strengthening communities. The Corporation intends to serve as a national catalyst and coordinator for volunteer disaster preparedness and relief efforts by further building the civic capacity and infrastructure of high priority communities to prevent, where possible, and to respond to the aftermath of terrorist or natural disasters. The Corporation will particularly work with Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs) and Citizen Corps to connect volunteers—whether youth, students or Boomers—with organizations dedicated to disaster response and preparedness.

We will also provide resources directly to community organizations to increase the number and quality of their preparedness and response trainings, thereby expanding the number of people ready to respond to a disaster, whether man-made or natural. We recognize that our current program participants, former participants, and community volunteers are themselves a very valuable resource and are essential for responding to disasters and coordinating other volunteers responding to disasters. They have a range of skills to rebuild homes and communities, connect victims with necessary services and address health care needs. The Corporation plans to capitalize on their dedication and motivation, to benefit those most in need.

By offering volunteers meaningful service opportunities, the Corporation and nonprofits across America will help strengthen volunteers' desire to continue their civic activities, thereby remaining connected to their communities. Following President Bush's lead, we believe national and community service is an effective engine for developing active and engaged citizens, which in turn strengthens our communities, our ability to meet challenges like disasters, and our democracy.

### National Service Responds to Gulf Coast Hurricanes

**B**uilding on experience gained in prior disasters, the Corporation took immediate steps to join with local, state, and national relief and recovery efforts to provide emergency assistance and long-term relief to those affected by Hurricane Katrina. Working largely through FEMA, the American Red Cross, and Governor-appointed state service commissions in the Gulf region, participants in the Corporation's Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and Special Volunteer programs performed a variety of critically needed services. They established and operated temporary shelters for evacuees, provided meals and social services, assisted with communications, coordinated the warehousing and distribution of donated goods, answered phones, cleared debris, provided information on housing and other resources, raised funds, and managed hundreds of community volunteers who had offered to help. More than 12,300 Corporation participants engaged in hurricane relief and recovery.

**H**ighlights include:

- ◇ Just one day after the storm hit, the AmeriCorps\*National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), which has responded to every significant disaster in the last decade, pulled four trained teams from other assignments and sent them to support shelters in Mississippi and Alabama. Since September, over 1,100 NCCC members have served on more than 50 separate disaster services projects in the Gulf Coast region.
- ◇ Several special volunteer programs originally funded by the Corporation in the area of homeland security provided critically needed assistance in the immediate response to the storm. Volunteer pilots with Mercy Medical Airlift, for example, made more than 200 flights to carry patients out of the disaster area, deliver medical supplies, and reunite families separated by the disaster. In addition, the American Amateur Radio Relay League established vital "ham" radio links that allowed local government agencies to coordinate relief activities.
- ◇ Consistent with the Corporation's role in the National Response Plan, some 15 different AmeriCorps state and national programs from around the country have been deployed to more than 30 projects in the Gulf Coast region, primarily through FEMA mission assignments. As of the end of 2005, more than 700 AmeriCorps members had performed nearly 200,000 hours of service, including staffing the Mississippi Call Center; planning youth activities on an evacuee cruise ship; assisting with housing needs, supporting warehouse operations, removing debris, and putting tarps on roofs.

## NATIONAL TARGETS FOR 2010

- » Engage 75 million Americans (age 16 and older) in volunteering, up from 65.4 million in 2005<sup>6</sup>
- » Engage 43 million Americans (age 16 and older) in regular volunteering (defined by those who volunteer 12+ weeks a year), up from 31.75 million in 2005
- » Ensure at least half of all nonprofit organizations and faith and community-based organizations that rely on volunteers regularly utilize effective volunteer recruitment and management practices, up from 31.3 in 2003<sup>7</sup>

## CORPORATION TARGETS FOR 2010

- » Leverage 4 million community volunteers who are recruited and managed within Corporation-sponsored national service programs
- » Engage 90 percent of former AmeriCorps members in volunteer activities in their communities after their term of service, up from 72 percent in 2005

For data sources and updates on annual targets, see [http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role\\_impact/strategic\\_plan.asp](http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/strategic_plan.asp)