



Proposed Cuts to AmeriCorps Would Be Devastating for Education Reform

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March 13, 2017

Nationally, somewhere between one-quarter and half of Americans volunteer every year.¹ This spirit of volunteerism is one of the ways Americans are unique when compared with citizens of other nations.² Perhaps this is why the idea of service opportunities for young people has been popular in the United States at least since former President John F. Kennedy called on his fellow Americans to “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Those words, spoken during Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address, inspired a generation to consider public and community service.³ It is perplexing then that the country’s main domestic national service programs are perpetually targeted by conservatives for cuts or even complete elimination.

The Trump administration will reportedly call for massive cuts to national service in its first budget.⁴ Although such cuts are problematic in their own right, one of the lesser-known effects of reducing funding for national service programs would be the devastating blow on the education reform movement. Many of the largest and most successful organizations working to improve education in America, such as KIPP charter schools, the Boston Teacher Residency, and Reading Corps, rely heavily on volunteers and other resources provided by national service programs to make their transformative results possible. In addition to reviewing the status of national service programs, this brief provides examples of some of the myriad ways national service programs create an infrastructure for traditional and charter schools; alternative certification programs for teachers; nonprofit out-of-school-time providers; and other efforts to expand educational opportunity.

Without national service programs and their cadre of dedicated volunteers, education reform could come to a grinding halt, as these programs and services would be far too expensive to provide without the assistance of volunteers. This makes the most recent proposal to eliminate these programs particularly concerning for the education community.⁵

National service in America

The Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS, is a federal agency that runs and distributes grants to a variety of national and community service programs, often in partnership with nonprofits and faith-based organizations. The CNCS runs several programs, including AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund.⁶ It also provides grants to states to administer their own service commissions, which in turn provide grants to local organizations.⁷

According to its website, CNCS programs serve more than 50,000 unique sites across the country.⁸ AmeriCorps, the largest of the CNCS programs, accounts for more than 21,000 of these sites and provides service opportunities for more than 80,000 volunteers.⁹

Costs and benefits of national service

In fiscal year 2016, the CNCS' total operation budget was \$788 million.¹⁰ Although this number may sound large, this amounts to 0.02 percent of the federal budget—\$3.854 trillion—and 0.14 percent of federal nonmilitary discretionary spending—\$561 billion.¹¹

Not only are CNCS programs an extremely small portion of the federal budget, they are also known for being some of the most efficient and effective uses of federal funds. According to sociologist Peter Frumkin and his co-author JoAnn Jastrzab, every \$1 spent on AmeriCorps state and national programs provides the federal government with \$3.52 worth of work. Even for the National Civilian Community Corps, or NCCC, which is more expensive because it provides volunteers with housing, every \$1 spent provides \$1.45 worth of work.¹²

Another study, which looked at the aggregate costs and benefits of national service—including both social and fiscal—estimated the social and economic returns to total approximately \$7.5 billion. This amounted to a return of more than \$2 for every taxpayer dollar spent and a social return of nearly \$4 for every dollar spent.¹³ The social return included benefits such as improved skills and human capital, greater lifetime civic engagement, lower delinquency and criminal activity, and even improved health status for volunteers.¹⁴ Cost-benefit analyses of more than 50 individual AmeriCorps programs have yielded similar results.¹⁵

Popularity of national service

Both the concept of national service and AmeriCorps, specifically, are extremely popular. A 2015 poll of voters in swing states reported that 83 percent of voters—including 90 percent of Democrats, 78 percent of Republicans, and 84 percent of

independents—support investments in national service programs. Only 12 percent of Republicans reported that they would prefer to completely defund national service programs.¹⁶ Likewise, large majorities reported supporting AmeriCorps and other types of CNCS programs.¹⁷

Funding threats and cuts

Despite its efficiency and its popularity, the CNCS is perpetually on the chopping block. Seemingly unaware of its positive brand and effectiveness, former Rep. Dick Armey (R-TX) even went so far as to call AmeriCorps “a welfare program for aspiring yuppies.”¹⁸ Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), the current chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, which oversees AmeriCorps, has called the program a “government-authorized charity” because of the modest living allowance that volunteers receive in exchange for devoting a year or more to full-time service.¹⁹

Below is a short list of just some of the funding challenges the CNCS has faced in recent years:

- **2003:** President George W. Bush signs legislation cutting AmeriCorps’ budget by one-third.²⁰
- **2003:** Budget cuts cause the CNCS to announce an 80 percent reduction in AmeriCorps volunteers.²¹
- **2004–2008:** President Bush’s budgets call for level funding or reductions of up to 10 percent.²² President Bush’s FY 2007 budget calls for a reduction of the NCCC to less than one-fifth its size.²³ Congress cuts the CNCS budget in FY 2005, FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008.²⁴
- **2009–2010:** Passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act with bipartisan support authorizes the expansion of national service programs for the first time in years, and appropriations allocated to the CNCS increase in FY 2009, as well as through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, and in FY 2010.²⁵
- **2011–2013:** Congress begins to reverse the CNCS funding expansions of 2009 and 2010. The Republican-controlled House votes to zero out AmeriCorps.²⁶ Cuts signed into law eliminate opportunities for service learning provided by the CNCS and reduce spending across all programs.²⁷ CNCS funding declines again in FY 2011, FY 2012, and FY 2013.²⁸
- **2013–2017:** It is reported that President Donald Trump plans to call for elimination of AmeriCorps in his budget. This comes after CNCS funding was restored to its pre-sequestration level for FY 2014, reversing the cuts of FY 2012 and FY 2013.²⁹ Small increases were provided in FY 2015 and FY 2016.³⁰

Impact of proposed funding cuts on education reform

The CNCS has a real and measurable impact on traditional public and public charter schools across the country. In 2016, an estimated 360,000 students participating in AmeriCorps state and national programs showed improved academic performance, and an estimated 152,000 students showed improved academic engagement.³¹ A majority of AmeriCorps' competitive grant awardees in 2016 were educational programs that reached schools and students in 41 states and Washington, D.C.³² Additionally, state service commissions distributed more than \$130 million from the CNCS—a significant portion of which likely went to education programming.³³

TABLE 1
AmeriCorps grantees that benefit public schools

Examples of programs that support both traditional public and public charter schools in the United States

Grantee	Area of support	Description
Boston Teacher Residency	New teacher and staffing support in Boston Public Schools	Boston teacher residents receive a \$12,500 stipend, an individual health insurance plan, and the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award through AmeriCorps' state competitive grants. The estimated value for teacher residents in 2016: \$1,096,500.
Boys & Girls Clubs of America	After-school programming for low-income students from both traditional public and public charter schools	Many AmeriCorps programs serve students after the school day ends. For example, the Boys & Girls Club receives AmeriCorps competitive grant funding to provide educational after-school activities to students. In 2016, clubs across the country received nearly \$2 million in national competitive grant funding and likely much more through competitive state AmeriCorps grants.
City Year	Tutoring and school programming support in traditional public and public charter schools in 26 locations across the United States	AmeriCorps members are placed full time in schools across the country to provide additional support for students at risk of dropping out of school. AmeriCorps members provide tutoring, run after school activities, and support the entire school community. In 2016, the program received \$33,999,681 to place nearly 3,000 members.
Reading Corps	Reading intervention and tutoring support in traditional public and public charter schools in more than 350 school districts in 13 locations across the United States	Many AmeriCorps members support schools through tutoring and reading programs, such as Reading Corps. Reading Corps is the largest AmeriCorps tutoring program in the country and received more than \$18 million through AmeriCorps competitive grant funding in 2016.
Relay Graduate School of Education	Teacher preparation and new teacher support in traditional public and public charter schools in 11 locations across the United States	Relay Graduate School of Education receives competitive Corporation for National Community Service grant funding, and all teaching residents have the opportunity to serve as AmeriCorps members and receive education awards for tuition or to pay off loans. In 2016, the organization received \$80,850 in competitive grant funding, and residents received an estimated \$866,250 in Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards.
Teach For America	New teacher and staffing support in traditional public and public charter schools in 53 locations across the United States	Teach For America Corps members are placed as teachers of record in schools across the country. Many Teach For America locations receive competitive AmeriCorps grant funding to operate. Additionally, members receive Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards to be used toward tuition or student loan repayments. The estimated value of the award to members in 2016: \$37,219,875. Teach for America Corps members are also able to defer federal student loans during their two years of service, without accruing interest.
TNTP Teaching Fellows	New teacher and staffing support in traditional public and public charter schools in five states across the United States	TNTP places teaching fellows in classrooms across the country, and many of its members are eligible to receive Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards. The estimated value of this award to teaching fellows in 2016: \$4,620,000.

Sources: Boston Teacher Residency, "Program," available at <http://www.bostonteacherresidency.org/program/> (last accessed March 2017); Corporation for National and Community Service, "AmeriCorps in Massachusetts," available at https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/state_profiles/pdf_2017/MA%20AmeriCorps.pdf (last accessed March 2017); Corporation for National and Community Service, "2016 AmeriCorps Grants," available at <https://www.nationalservice.gov/node/37814> (last accessed March 2017); City Year, "#MakeBetterHappen: Annual Report 2015" (2015), available at https://www.cityyear.org/sites/default/files/AnnualReport2015Final_lowRes%20%281%29.pdf; City Year, "Our Approach," available at <https://www.cityyear.org/what-we-do/our-approach> (last accessed March 2017); Reading Corps, "Homepage," <http://www.readingcorps.org/> (last accessed March 2017); Relay Graduate School of Education, "Relay Teaching Residency," available at <http://www.relay.edu/relay-teaching-residency> (last accessed March 2017); Teach For America, "Where We Work," available at <https://www.teachforamerica.org/where-we-work> (last accessed March 2017); Teach For America, "Salary, Benefits, and Aid," available at <https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/leading-classroom/salary-benefits-aid> (last accessed March 2017); TNTP Teaching Fellows, "Homepage," available at <http://tnpteachingfellows.org/> (last accessed March 2017); NYC Teaching Fellows, "Salary and Benefits," available at <https://nyc Teaching Fellows.org/salary-benefits> (last accessed March 2017).

Under the Trump administration's current proposal to cut AmeriCorps funding, schools and students would suffer. It would be extremely costly to replace the volunteers who provide much-needed support during and after the school day. The programs detailed above, and many others like them, would have to be vastly scaled back or cut entirely as it would become too expensive to maintain their current levels of operation.

Reducing or eliminating funding for these programs would also be especially harmful to charter management organizations that recruit heavily from the AmeriCorps alumni network, including KIPP, Success Academy Charter Schools, and Green Dot Public Schools, all of which have formed official "career partnerships" with City Year, or Uncommon Schools, which advertises on the AmeriCorps alumni career site.³⁴ Likewise, public charter schools and traditional districts looking to fill hard-to-staff schools and subject areas also rely on AmeriCorps-funded teacher residencies and teaching fellowships and would likely be in trouble if these programs disappeared.³⁵ For example, Achievement First, a network of public charter schools, has described Teach For America as "its most effective recruiting source," hiring both AmeriCorps members and alumni from the program.³⁶

Many of these programs, such as the Boston Teacher Residency, also provide a much-needed pathway for schools to diversify their teacher workforce.³⁷ Cutting support for these teacher residencies and fellowships, which focus on recruiting excellent and diverse candidates, will contribute to the widening teacher diversity gap.³⁸

The programs listed above represent just a fraction of the impact and reach that the CNCS has on students and schools. Beyond providing funding to programs through AmeriCorps state and national grants, the CNCS also administers a number of its own programs that support schools, students, and education nonprofits, including Senior Corps and AmeriCorps VISTA. Senior Corps' Foster Grandparents program provides an opportunity for volunteers age 55 and older to serve as mentors and tutors for students.³⁹ In 2016, an estimated 24,000 Foster Grandparents volunteers served approximately 200,000 students.⁴⁰ Similarly, in 2016, AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers were approved to provide capacity-building assistance to more than 2,900 education-related project sites.⁴¹ Cutting funding for the CNCS would mean eliminating a substantial amount of necessary support for traditional public and public charter schools and would hurt low-income students across the country.

Conclusion

While it may not be widely known, many of the positive changes seen in education reform over the past few decades—from replication of high-quality charter schools to expansion of teacher residency programs—have been made possible, at least in part, through partnerships with AmeriCorps and other national service programs.

Eliminating national service programs would harm thousands of schools and hundreds of thousands of students— who receive everything from after-school programming to help applying to colleges to reading tutoring as a result of AmeriCorps and national service funding—and decimate these successful programs.

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