

Update: 2011 - 2015 Strategic Plan Process

As the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) continues to develop our 2011 - 2015 strategic plan, we are grateful for the commitment of our stakeholders in working together to fulfill the promise of the Serve America Act (SAA). The Act has been the top priority of our agency, and given the breadth of the social impact focus areas that are outlined in SAA, CNCS and our stakeholders have many opportunities to make significant progress in addressing issues of critical concern to the nation.

BACKGROUND ON THE PRIORITIES FOR CNCS' 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Every five years, Congress requests each federal agency to adopt a strategic plan that defines its missions, goals and the means by which it will measure its progress. With the SAA as our guide, CNCS is considering the following strategic goals to guide its work over the next five years:

- Increase the social impact on individuals in communities served through CNCS programs
- Increase the number and diversity of those who participate in national service
- Increase the investment in community programs that work
- Strengthen individual, organizational and community capacity to use service as a solution to achieve results

The Serve America Act stipulates that national service should focus on areas of national need, identifying education, energy conservation, health, economic opportunity and disaster services as top priorities. Engaging veterans as participants in and recipients of service was also highlighted as a priority. Thus, in looking to increase impact in communities, CNCS will focus its efforts in these areas.

The solutions to these challenges are not simple. They require an "all hands on deck" approach that engages multiple partners, organizations and approaches. Targeting resources to tackle national priorities from increasing high school graduation rates to fostering economic opportunity, CNCS will identify where service has an important role to play and target resources to tackle those issues.

That said, these national priorities are best addressed through local solutions. CNCS will continue to work with state commissions, local governments and community based organizations to ensure that the full potential of service and volunteering can be effectively harnessed.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Reporting back to the American public on the results of our work is fundamental to CNCS and its guiding principles of accountability, transparency and integrity. In light of the breadth of issues identified in the SAA, CNCS has elected to prioritize specific challenges where we believe national service has the greatest opportunity to improve lives and strengthen communities. Referred to as Key Objectives, these measures identify priorities to guide funding and program implementation, but do not limit the agency's work. The Key Objectives more specifically define the problems that we believe national service and volunteering can address - but do not prescribe solutions. We strived to keep our Key Objectives broad enough to address national challenges and needs, yet focused enough to still be able to measure the impact, as they outline how the public will hold CNCS accountable over the next five years. This focused approach provides a platform for in-depth learning and aggregated national impact on the country's most pressing challenges.

The Key Objectives listed below were informed by more than 60 interviews with industry experts and thought leaders in the field, as well as input from over 1,400 stakeholders through in-person and online forums. This input helped us identify those Key Objectives that present the most strategic opportunities in addressing the focus areas outlined in the SAA.

Focus Areas as Outlined in SAA	Proposed Key Objectives*
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improve graduation rates for students •Improve grade-level performance
Healthy Futures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improve the health and wellness of individuals in the areas of obesity prevention, aging in place and access to health services
Environmental Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reduce consumption of fossil fuels •Improve at-risk ecosystems
Veterans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increase economic, education and health opportunities for veterans and military families by leveraging national service, including veterans serving veterans
Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improve financial stability, access to affordable housing and employment opportunities for economically vulnerable families
Disaster Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increase capacity of communities to serve vulnerable populations in the event of a disaster •Improve communities in disaster-affected areas

The Key Objectives define issues of focus, but will not represent all that we do. We anticipate most, but not all of CNCS' activities and support in each focus area will align with our Key Objectives. The Key Objectives define the impact we want to achieve and are not intentional towards specific program models or approaches. It is incumbent upon our stakeholders to demonstrate how their program activities broadly address the national priorities as outlined in the SAA to address critical needs and optionally how they address the Key Objectives.

In 2010, more than 80% of AmeriCorps State and National awards were within the broadly defined focus area. Thus, the strategic plan will continue to recognize the alignment between grantee programs and extends this focus across all CNCS programs. Although CNCS' strategic plan defines the problems, solutions must come from the community. Furthermore, we are striving for an optimum blend of two factors: (1) supporting programs and initiatives that have a clear and specific community impact and solve community problems and (2) ensuring that national service participants themselves are personally impacted by and learn from their experience so that they continue to serve their communities and impact community problems long after their service is complete. This is an opportunity for all of us to push for deeper and better results in our communities.

CNCS is committed to an ongoing dialogue with all of our stakeholders. We will release a strategy brief in September 2010 and will solicit input from the public to explore how we can work together to ensure that we are creating, supporting and expanding comprehensive approaches to problems that our local communities are facing.

NEXT STEPS

Internally, we will continue to refine the Key Objectives listed above. We are working to propose a set of metrics and indicators for our staff to provide additional specificity that will be used by the board and the CEO to monitor CNCS' performance. The result will be a "chain of outcomes" that directly links the work of grantees, partners and service participants to the Key Objectives.

Our stakeholders have helped to lay a strong foundation for national service, and that infrastructure is the platform for the future. The opportunities for national service are greater than they ever have been, and yet so are the expectations and accountability. We stand committed to working in partnership with all of our stakeholders to unleash the power of service and volunteering in ways that have a accumulative and catalytic affect - creating ripples that ignite a robust pipeline of civically engaged citizens who, through service, increase the ability of local communities to solve local problems.

Once the strategic plan is complete, we will disseminate this announcement through various mechanisms to ensure that you have a chance to examine the plan that you helped to create!

*Subject to change