



The Great Public-Service Talent Search

Using National Service to Grow and Develop Human Resources for Antipoverty Programs and Other Public Needs

Joy Moses and Shirley Sagawa February 2013



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Introduction and summary

At this critical time, as public-service agencies—government at all levels and nonprofit organizations that serve the public—are facing increased demand with fewer resources, having a quality workforce is essential. But many public-service agencies are experiencing significant human resource challenges, including high turnover due to poor pay and stressful working conditions, aging workforces, and shortages of skilled professionals. Any one of these issues can greatly impact a program’s success, and even the most well-designed programs will not work if they have people problems. Thus, activities aimed at building and developing our public-service workforce are critically important. Unfortunately, previous studies have shown that public-service fields such as government, education, and health care lag behind private-sector companies in most areas of talent development.¹

While a multifaceted approach is needed to address human resource issues in public service, the strategic expansion of national service—short-term commitments to volunteer or work for limited stipends in fields that help people and communities in areas such as education or conservation—has much to contribute to the development of “talent” in the helping fields. AmeriCorps, the federal government’s largest civilian national-service program, has been shown to have a significant impact on members’ career choices. A longitudinal study based on data collected eight years after members completed their one year of service conclusively demonstrates that AmeriCorps alumni are significantly more civically engaged and more likely to pursue public-service careers in the government and nonprofit sector than their counterparts in the comparison group.² Evidence from individual AmeriCorps programs similarly supports this conclusion.

Any expansion of national service, if it is to successfully bear fruit, must be rooted in:

- Approaches that meet the immediate human resource needs of the targeted field
- Long-term thinking about how to continue to engage participants even after they have completed service periods

National service is an ideal vehicle to connect with underutilized talent groups, including youth, retirees, veterans, and parents returning to the workforce—individuals who often express an interest in service.

A greater investment in national service produces a wealth of benefits, including helping agencies and organizations to:

- Manage fiscal constraints
- Strategically advance program goals
- Build and develop a workforce
- Access skilled professionals and individuals with valuable life experiences
- Spark innovation
- Elevate the prestige of their fields

Nonprofit organizations and government agencies at all levels should invest resources in building new service corps that take advantage of these benefits. This will ultimately help them to harness the talent within their field and achieve desired outcomes such as reducing poverty.

Various national-service models are informative, including ones from the emergency management, education, legal services, and child welfare fields. Important lessons can be learned from them about recruitment, training and mentoring, retention, establishing avenues for innovation, building career ladders, and ultimately achieving legislative and programmatic goals that improve the services being offered for the people and communities that they serve.

This paper lays out a blue print for establishing and expanding service models and provides guidance to help public agencies and organizations figure out how to get started and how to go about making important decisions concerning intended goals, program design, and the implementation of culture change.

Public-service agencies and the need to focus on talent

People are one of the most critical components determining the success of anti-poverty and other government programs. For those who work in public service, this is intuitive and accepted as fact. They may know, for instance, of a children's program that gets good results and assume that is due to the quality of its organizational leader or frontline program workers, all of whom may be particularly passionate about their work and helping children, demonstrate cultural competency in working with the population, or must possess some other qualities that they just can't put their finger on.

In some areas there is research to support the importance of intuition and that it is the people behind the programs that can make all the difference. The Center for American Progress has produced a series of publications demonstrating that effective teachers are crucial to student success, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office has found that staffing is important to other youth services. It stated the following in *Disconnected Youth: Federal Action Could Address Some of the Challenges Faced By Local Programs That Reconnect Youth to Education and Employment*: "Many youth we spoke with across programs agreed that staff were a primary reason they continued in the program."³ Quality staffing was key to program success: Youth who remain engaged in the programs are able to achieve their intended benefits.

The importance of successful talent management to public service is clear, as are the current existing challenges. Let's examine some of these challenges in greater detail.

Recession, recovery, and budget cuts

The Great Recession and the slow recovery have negatively impacted funding at all levels of government. The federal government, burdened by the expensive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Bush tax cuts, has been endeavoring to balance the national budget. Since 2011 the federal government has achieved \$2.4 tril-

lion in deficit reduction, three-quarters of which came through spending cuts.⁴ Likewise, states faced similar fiscal challenges and experienced \$540 billion in budget shortfalls between 2009 and 2012. Local governments fared no better.⁵ Meanwhile, a broad range of nonprofits—many of which serve low-income Americans—have experienced three consecutive years of increased demand for services ranging from food to shelter to job assistance, but 31 percent of these service organizations operated in the red, and 20 percent had to greatly reduce or eliminate services.⁶

At a time when many public agencies are beset with hiring freezes and layoffs, it may seem counterintuitive to think about recruitment policies. But this is exactly the time to consider these types of questions. First, if an agency must operate with limited staffing for some period moving forward, there is even more of an imperative to find the best people possible. Second, smart thinking during lean times allows for smart growth when resources once again expand. And finally, the tool of national service allows for the leveraging of resources to bring on short-term help to meet critical needs.

“Low priority” syndrome

In the midst of efforts to balance budgets, some programs or services are deemed less critical than others depending on the function they serve and the shared values of policymakers at all levels of government. Such programs, some of which serve the poor, are more likely to face deeper cuts—or indeed, cuts at all—than programs viewed as being priorities. These “low-priority” programs must therefore develop creative ways to make do with less while still maintaining the levels of human resources necessary to reach their goals.

Competition for funding

Governments, private foundations, and donors increasingly want public-service programs to demonstrate certain levels of success in order to be competitive for limited funding resources. Staffing becomes all the more important in this scenario. An agency can have the most well-designed program in the world, but without an effective staff to implement it, its ability to achieve and prove success will be limited and its current and future funding will be threatened.

Aging workforce

Some public-service professions will soon face a talent void as aging workforces ready for retirement. *The American Way to Change: How National Service & Volunteers are Transforming America*, a book by CAP Visiting Fellow Shirley Sagawa, explains the severe impact of the baby-boomer generation reaching retirement, pointing out that over the next decade the nonprofit public-service sector will lose more than 50 percent of its current leadership, requiring 640,000 new leaders. Additionally, the report notes that the federal government is currently in need of an estimated 270,000 new workers across its various agencies.⁷

Turnover

Aside from concerns about an aging workforce, public-service agencies tend to experience lower turnover rates than private employers, perhaps due to job stability and the quality-of-life and benefits factors associated with some public-service professions.⁸ Nevertheless, there is a need to have a pool of quality workers to draw upon in response to the turnover that does occur. There is also a need to ensure that the best possible workers are obtained to fill the limited number of spots when there are openings.

Diversity

Some fields and agencies are lacking in diversity—racial, gender, socioeconomic background, and other types. Many of these professions and organizations recognize the importance of having a diversity of perspectives, personalities, and life experiences informing their work, so that staff members can hopefully find a sense of connection with those being served.

Growing use of technology

The growing use of technology that allows for the easy storage and access of records, for individuals to apply for benefits online, and for other conveniences decreases the amount of human resources needed for paperwork and suggests the need to rethink the talent requirements of agencies and organizations. Ideally,

this would translate into better uses of time and an opportunity for more human resources to be spent on actually helping people and improving program results.

Prestige problems

Public service is often associated with having lower pay than the private sector. For this reason as well as others, work in the public-service field can be considered less prestigious than other forms of employment. Efforts to elevate the prestige of the work—by, for example, making it a more competitive field to enter—are needed to draw the best possible talent to public service.

Lack of special skills professionals

Within some fields of public service—such as health care—there is a shortage of individuals with specialized skills and training: Doctors, for example, and other health care workers, as well as mental health professionals and social workers. A history of resource constraints may have prevented agencies from offering the salaries that these types of professionals typically require; these professionals may not be drawn to particular fields or regions of the country; or other factors may exist that vary by field. At any rate, these individuals could be tremendously helpful to such goals as ending poverty.

Small agencies and organizations

Many public-service agencies are small. As a result, they have limited financial and human resources available to develop sophisticated means of talent management. The ability to band together with other nonprofits or rely on outside entities for direct help and guidance with talent management would be helpful to small agencies.

Given the importance of talent management to public-service work at the local level—those who directly interact with low-income clients and program participants—and the current challenges associated with it, too little attention is paid to talent by those involved in federal- and state-level policy development and implementation—legislators, administrative agency officials, advocates, and researchers. Those at the federal and state level are in a unique position to identify what works in talent management across fields, regions, and service populations.

Skill sets and personality traits helpful in working with youth, for example, may differ from those that are helpful when working with seniors or recent immigrants. Federal- and state-level workers are also in the position to share model practices and develop policies that support their implementation.

Undoubtedly, addressing talent management at the local level will require multiple components. This report is focused on just one already existing and significantly important tool—national service as one means of recruiting high-quality, underutilized talent to vitally important public-service professions that work directly with low-income people and communities.

National service provides an important bridge between the talent needs of public-service agencies, as outlined above, and the important sources of underutilized talent.

Underutilized talent

Public-service programs can grow and further develop strategies to take advantage of America's underutilized talent pools. Certain subgroups—such as youth, retirees, veterans, parents, and people reentering the workforce after an extended break—have much to offer.

Youth

Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 must compete in the job market with more seasoned workers or find designated entry-level opportunities. At the end of 2012, 24 percent of people ages 16 to 19 and 14 percent of people ages 20 to 24 were unemployed.⁹ Furthermore, there is a subset of young people—often referred to as “opportunity youth”—that experiences the greatest challenges. These young people have no significant or lasting connections to either work or school; there are an estimated 6.7 million of them, and they are more likely than other youths to be poor and have limited education.¹⁰

Public-service agencies should be particularly interested in youthful workers because:

- **Youth are interested in them.** Many young people want to be involved in public service. A survey of graduating college students revealed that the top three areas in which they want to work are government, human services, and education.¹¹ Similar inclinations may exist among those young people who don't have degrees or who have yet to complete one. Despite this interest, relative to the general population, youths aged 16 to 24 are under-represented within government service. Last summer 16 percent of all workers were in government service compared to just 7 percent of those workers who were 16 to 24 years old.¹²
- **Energy and innovation.** Youthful energy is sometimes helpful in reinvigorating offices and efforts. Fresh sets of eyes on old situations can help bring about change and innovation in places where there is sufficient encouragement and

space for new ideas. Age diversity is especially important in the antipoverty world. The field largely targets young parents and children. Engaging workers closer to the age of the target group is likely to advance program goals.

- **Affordability.** Young workers motivated by an opportunity to give back to their communities and gain valuable work experience are often willing to serve in exchange for a modest living allowance. This group has student loan challenges: Affordability is the most common reason young workers cite for not being in school, and an estimated 40 percent of people under the age of 30 have outstanding student loan debt.¹³ Thus, increasingly better opportunities that allow students to earn educational scholarships for their service or to benefit from loan-payment deferrals or excused debt for their service—a policy decision that is within the power of government—can prove to be relatively inexpensive means of building a strong public-service workforce.

Retirees

In 2011 the oldest baby boomers reached the retirement age of 65. There are 76 million people in this generation, made up of people born in the period after World War II. Current trends suggest that an increasing percentage of this demographic will continue working even after they retire. In a 2011 American Association of Retired Persons, or AARP, poll found that fully 81 percent of baby boomers expect to be engaged in some form of work once they retire.¹⁴ Part-time work was the most popular expectation, although some researchers suggest that most working retirees have full-time positions, with some working more than 40 hours a week.¹⁵

Public-service agencies and national service agencies should be particularly interested in this talent pool because they:

- **Have a desire to serve.** Teaching, nursing, and child care were among the top 10 most popular post-retirement jobs.¹⁶ Since these fields can offer national-service opportunities and are experiencing critical worker shortages, retirees' desire to work in these areas provides a tremendous opportunity.
- **Possess experience.** Older workers obviously offer in-depth professional experience from a diversity of fields. They also have life experience that may be tremendously valuable to human services agencies. A grandmother, for example,

may have a lot of wisdom to share about childrearing with participants in a program for teenage mothers.

- **Appreciate supplementary income.** Only 14 percent of baby boomers are completely satisfied with their retirement savings, and a growing number—44 percent—don’t think that they will be able to afford the lifestyle they want in retirement.¹⁷ Thus, those who have other primary sources of income appreciate part-time opportunities that allow them to earn a little bit extra. Others don’t need the income but just want something meaningful to do. In engaging older workers on a part-time basis, agencies can benefit from their experience while still paying them less than they earned before retirement since they are working fewer hours.
- **Are happier workers and improve work environments.** Job satisfaction increases with age, and retirees are happier with their work than those who have yet to retire.¹⁸ Retirees may therefore bring more positive energy to their work and workplaces.

Veterans

Many veterans are doing well in the workforce. Unfortunately, this isn’t always the case for veterans who served during the most recent Gulf Wars—a group that continues to be associated with some troublesome statistics. By the end of 2012, 10.2 percent of these veterans were unemployed compared to 7.4 percent of nonveterans.¹⁹

Younger veterans ages 18 to 24 warrant particular concern: 1 in 4 were unemployed at the end of 2012.²⁰ This is due in part to the increased numbers leaving active military duty, suggesting an evolving group of people in need of work. But other factors are also relevant, such as young veterans being more likely than nonveterans to participate in the job market, either by working or looking for work; a reluctance by some employers to hire individuals who could be called to duty; and the general challenges faced by youth in the job market—challenges largely stemming from a lack of work experience, which hinders their ability to compete for jobs with more seasoned workers.

Public-service agencies and national-service programs should be interested in veterans because they:

- **Possess useful skills and work experience.** Veterans represent a broad range of educational and work backgrounds, offering expertise to a diverse area of issues. Their military service requires them to develop certain skills that are useful in public service and other work situations such as the leadership and problem-solving skills and the ability to work in high-stress situations and in a team. Finally, given the nature of recent military efforts, there is reason to believe that some veterans' experience with nation building abroad could translate to domestic community-development efforts.
- **Are already inclined toward service.** Government is already the largest employer of veterans. In 2010 30 percent of veterans who served in the most recent Gulf War worked for federal, state, or local governments, and according to the online job service Monster.com, veterans' most desire to work in government or the military.²¹ Veterans of the recent Gulf wars are particularly inclined toward certain issues: 95 percent want to serve wounded veterans, 88 percent want to participate in disaster relief, 86 percent want to serve at-risk youth, and 82 percent want to help senior citizens.²²
- **Require a period of transition.** Forty percent of veterans from the most recent Gulf wars indicate that they are experiencing difficulties readjusting to civilian life.²³ Those who volunteer, however, are more likely to report that their transitions are going well. Thus, national service is likely a good option for many, generally helping returning veterans readjust and providing them with an opportunity to figure out what to do next before making any long-term commitments—and some will certainly decide to continue in public service.

Parents re-entering the workforce

Career-oriented parents of young children are another underutilized pool of talent. These parents struggle with decisions balancing work and family—they want to advance in their careers while also making the parenting choices that are best for their children. An estimated 43 percent of highly qualified working mothers step out of the workforce at some point and stay out for an average of two years.²⁴ Time lost in building professional experience and networks translates into lower future earnings and, for some, re-entering the workforce after an absence can be

challenging.²⁵ Thus, a growing number of parents—and especially 48 percent of career-oriented mothers—want to work part time during their children’s preschool years, and most want to return to full-time work afterwards.²⁶ Public-service employers and national-service programs that allow parents to maintain connections to the work world while building and developing valuable skills could be very attractive to career-ambitious parents. Some parents may even desire to continue in public service once they return to full-time work.

National service: Addressing the needs of public-service agencies

National service is one vital tool that can help public-service agencies address their talent needs. Importantly, it can help build a bridge between these agencies and the underutilized talent groups described above who are excited about public service and who often possess valuable skills and life experiences. National service is further associated with other tangible benefits that ultimately advance program goals and the achievement of desired outcomes.

To fully understand its value, it is important to understand the basics of national service, as well as its origins and how it has been shown to create mutually beneficial results for public-service agencies and underutilized talent.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act by former President Bill Clinton. This legislation authorized a large-scale national-service program, which was subsequently expanded by former President George W. Bush. In 2009 President Barack Obama signed the Serve America Act to tie national service to important priorities and to increase the number of people serving annually in AmeriCorps to 250,000, although funding has been inadequate to achieve these targets. In the years since the signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act in 1993, more than 750,000 Americans have served in AmeriCorps and become eligible for Segal Education Awards, which can be used to pay education costs at qualifying institutions of high education.²⁷

Over the years a number of service models have emerged—some funded under the federal national-service legislation—that are informative to efforts to develop programs that advance the immediate needs of public-service agencies and organizations while also being mindful of the long-term human resource needs of particular fields. Examples can be found in fields such as emergency management, education, legal services, and child welfare. (see text boxes below)

National service: Emergency management

When Hurricane Sandy hit the east coast at the end of last year, the federal response teams included members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's service arm FEMA Corps, which was created in March 2012. These individuals helped survivors register for disaster assistance, cleared debris, processed donations, and distributed supplies, among other things. According to one Corps member, "Many [storm survivors] were appreciative to see us and relieved just to have someone just to talk to."

FEMA Corps represents a partnership between the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Corporation for National and

Community Service whose goal is to create 1,600 member slots for youth 18 to 24 years old. Not only was it designed to grow the nation's capacity to respond to disaster, but it also has an explicit goal of "creating pathways to work for young people" through training, experience, and educational opportunity. The intention is to prepare youth for careers in emergency management and to meet some workforce development goals such as increasing diversity and reliability within the field.

Sources: FEMA, "An Innovative Cost-Saving Partnership to Strengthen Disaster Response and Expand Opportunities for Young People" (2013); Deanne Criswell, "FEMA Corps, Expanding Opportunities for Young Adults" (Washington: FEMA, 2012).

Moreover, the list of noted benefits associated with agency engagement in national service is long.

- **Manage fiscal constraints.** Public-service agencies commonly experience budgetary constraints while trying to address needs that far outpace their resources. The Great Recession and subsequent recovery period have only exacerbated this norm. Under such conditions, national service provides manpower to maintain and grow the work of agencies.
- **Strategically advance program goals and improve outcomes.** Programs can be thoughtful about their approaches to service, shaping the work of service participants to advance the agency's mission and established goals. In doing so, they provide participants with relevant training, mentoring, and other tools designed to achieve desired outcomes. Agencies and organizations can measure the outcomes achieved by service participants and deliberately make course corrections that better the outcomes achieved by service members.
- **Access skilled professionals who would otherwise be unaffordable.** Service can be used to engage individuals recently completing relevant graduate school programs. Full-time service opportunities help jumpstart their careers by giving them valuable, real-world work experience and professional development while helping them pay for their education through Segal Education Awards and college loan forgiveness opportunities offered through both public and private sources.

- **Access workers with valuable life experiences.** National-service participants may have life experiences that are particularly valuable to the work of service agencies. Some workers, for example, may have experienced poverty or lived in the neighborhoods being serviced by a program, or youth service participants may find it easier to relate to teens in an agency's youth program.
- **Move beyond accessing workers to developing a workforce.** As previously noted, service programs help agencies access diverse workers—varying in such factors as age, race, socioeconomic background, gender, education and skills attainment, and life experience. Once these individuals have been exposed to a field and acquired knowledge and professional contacts, many decide to pursue a career in the service field. This is a definite plus for agencies cognizant of long-term talent management and facing human resources challenges.
- **Spark innovation.** Bringing new and diverse individuals into a field is a pathway toward innovation. Individuals with different life experiences view things in different ways, and they may also have new ideas about how to expand and improve programming. And the flexibility offered by national service provides room for service participants to take new approaches, work across silos, and innovate in other ways.
- **Reduce poverty through creating opportunity.** Agencies creating service programs that engage opportunity youth and other low-income people help to reduce poverty among those individuals. In the short term, participants have access to living stipends, education awards, and health care. But they are also developing long-term skills and a work history that improves their future outlook for work and earnings.
- **Take advantage of new funding opportunities.** Programs that incorporate service into their work may become eligible for new funding opportunities. Some government programs, for example, reward grantees who are able to effectively leverage resources through such means as incorporating service into their work. Funders may be particularly enamored of funding service-employment opportunities for particular groups of people such as youth or veterans.
- **Elevate the prestige of a field.** Participating in national service is a competitive process that draws highly talented people from across the country. Attracting individuals who both desire to serve in a particular program and are highly talented helps to elevate the respect for the field and the work. Also, processes that are more competitive raise the bar on the talent that enters a specific field and program outcomes are sure to improve relative to the extent that individuals selected remain involved over the long term.

Field: Legal services

Much can be learned from the legal services field. One significant example is the service program developed by the nonprofit organization Equal Justice Works, which has some of its service opportunities funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service and each year places upward of 70 to 80 attorneys in civil legal services organizations across the country. Participants are largely recent law school graduates who agree to two years of service using their legal education to help low-income Americans. It has been transformative for the field, recruiting from law schools, helping to train participants, and providing them with stipends and education awards to serve at nonprofit organizations. Many participants continue in the field of public service even after their service period, substantially contributing to the talent pool of public-service lawyers and becoming an unofficial gateway into the field.

One notable aspect of Equal Justice Works is that it identifies a specific project for the service participant to take ownership of, carving out a space for him or her to develop and implement new ideas and methods of service. During the process, the service participant benefits from advice and assistance from a supervisor. Importantly, they also spend part of their time contributing to previously existing projects and client work, helping to reduce some of the burden of the work load for existing staff.

Operating on a much smaller scale is the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project, which provides legal assistance to domestic violence survivors in the District of Columbia, helping them to obtain civil protection orders and deal with other family law issues. Volunteers receive no form of compensation. The organization is informative in that it provides one example of a good way to use one group of underutilized talent—stay-at-home moms who want to remain connected to, or transition back into, work that allows them to make use of their legal degrees. The model was so appealing—allowing volunteers to do some of their service from home—that hundreds of volunteers came forward largely through word of mouth. Some of the mothers returned to full-time work in the field of domestic violence and other forms of public service. In the meantime, the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project has become the largest resource of family law pro bono assistance in Washington, D.C.

Sources: Interview with Kerry O'Brien, Director of Federal Programs and Strategic Initiatives, Equal Justice Works, June 26, 2012; Interview with Jenny Brody, Founder and President of the Board of Directors, DC Volunteer Lawyers Project, July 11, 2012.

Blueprint for agencies and programs wanting to engage in national service

This section provides information for agencies interested in exploring service as a means to advance their missions. It covers the major areas that they must consider.

National service refers to full-time civilian service ; AmeriCorps is the federal government's major national-service program. Participants in the program typically receive a modest living allowance—one that is at least equal to minimum wage—and they may receive other benefits as well, including health insurance and an education award or other benefit at the end of their term of service. National service is typically a full-time endeavor, so individuals require financial supports to enable their participation. In some cases, part-time service may qualify as national service.

The funding streams of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency responsible for the nation's major national service programs, include:

- **Grant-funded AmeriCorps.** Grants are awarded on a competitive and formula basis to states and nonprofit organizations to operate AmeriCorps programs.
- **Education award-only AmeriCorps.** Nonprofits and public agencies may compete for Segal Education Awards, which are typically accompanied by modest fixed grants.
- **Volunteers in Service to America, or VISTA.** VISTA positions are allocated directly by the Corporation for National and Community Service, either through its state office structure or at the national level. VISTA projects must focus on building permanent infrastructure in organizations to help them more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty.
- **VISTA cost-shares.** Cost-shares are VISTA positions that are paid for—in full or in part—by a source other than the Corporation for National and Community Service, such as private donors or foundations.

- **National Civilian Community Corps, or NCCC.** The NCCC is the only AmeriCorps program directly operated by the Corporation for National and Community Service. A residential program, the NCCC provides housing, living allowances, benefits, and education awards to members, who may be deployed on projects throughout the country.

AmeriCorps grant funding is limited, and governor-appointed state commissions or national nonprofit organizations usually award it based on competition. In the past, however, federal agencies have developed partnerships with the Corporation for National and Community Service, which has established expertise and existing structures for running national-service programs, to secure VISTA positions or use their own resources to pay the costs of AmeriCorps programs. The Corporation for National and Community Service, for example, operates FEMA Corps with resources provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to the National Civilian Community Corps. State and local public agencies may access AmeriCorps through their state commissions, which receive some funding based on a formula and may apply for additional funds on a competitive basis.

Agencies interested in pursuing national service as a strategy to address talent challenges might take the following steps:

Assess your needs

Agencies should begin the process with a needs assessment of the human resource challenges of their fields. Studies identifying current or future gaps in workforce quality or size may point to areas in which a national-service strategy might be beneficial. If such studies are not available, a survey of agency grantees, personnel, or other data may be collected to determine where gaps may be emerging.

Develop goals

Based on the needs assessment, identify specific goals for your effort. Goals may specify the specific jobs or regions to be targeted or the types of individuals to be recruited. When possible, goals should include measures of success, including numbers of individuals to be engaged.

National service: Education

Teach for America is probably the most well-known service program. It aims to recruit high-quality talent to teaching with the goal of improving the outcomes associated with that field. Its participants make a two-year commitment to teach low-income students in schools across the country. They benefit from training and a vast peer and alumni network.

Much has been said and written about Teach for America; in this report, the focus is on two aspects of their model. First, it has been successful in drawing significant numbers of recent college graduates, many from elite institutions, to commit to a period of service—the program currently has more than 10,000 members in the field. By creating a high demand for spots, competition has

increased as well as the prestige associated with participating in the program and teaching low-income students. Second, the program has put an emphasis on diversity. In doing so, it has recruited from—and formed partnerships with—an extensive list of colleges and organizations predominately consisting of people of color. The result has been a diverse group of participants, 38 percent of which are people of color. Thus, Teach for America demonstrates how service can help to draw diverse and high-quality talent to a field in need of workforce development.

Source: Teach for America, "About Teach For America," available at https://www.teachforamerica.org/sites/default/files/2012-13_press_kit_updated_12_21_12.pdf (last accessed February 2013).

Identify models

Early in the process, it may be useful to reach out to the Corporation for National and Community Service for advice regarding ways that national service could address identified needs. The corporation may help identify existing models, which may also be of assistance in conceptualizing a larger-scale effort.

Identify resources

Creating a program takes resources to pay for living allowances, benefits, and program infrastructure. Some agencies have used discretionary money for this purpose or identified private-sector sources to support program costs. Agencies might also identify funding streams in their control that could support national service through current law or with minor legislative or regulatory changes. Informing agencies and organizations funds may be used for national service programs, using the bully pulpit, and lifting up model programs may also spur a field of public service to consider national-service strategies.

Fine-tune program designs

When developing a service program, agencies should consider the target population to be recruited; the effective methods of reaching and attracting these individuals; the best methods to orient and train them; the best ways to supervise their work; and the best ways to assess the impact of the program. Deciding if the program should be operated through a grant structure or other funding model and who are natural partners—such as universities, national associations, or existing service programs—are other questions that must be answered.

Assess cost-benefit

Agencies may want to assess the cost effectiveness of service strategies as a way to justify their pursuit to any stakeholders who might see such strategies as outside the mainstream and therefore unwise. At a minimum, agencies should be able to provide the expected value of the service to be provided and to show how much the service might cost if funded through traditional means.

Connect to the larger national-service network

Finally, agencies should consider whether their programs would benefit from being part of the Corporation for National and Community Service network. In some cases, the Corporation for National and Community Service may be able to provide Segal Educational Awards to program members, which may help with agencies' recruitment.

Prepare existing workforce for a sea change

Introducing a service program and its participants into the work of your field may represent a sea change—and sometimes, change is difficult. Some thought must be given as to how to create a welcoming and supportive environment for this new effort.

Leadership is key—leaders at the federal and state level must be demonstrably invested in these efforts and convey enthusiasm and commitment for successfully moving them forward. This must be supported by well-designed training and technical assistance, including model examples from particular fields of public service.

Local-level all-stars—program administrators with proven success in implementing other initiatives—should be identified and supported with the expectation that they can create new models that can be replicated by their colleagues. These outstanding individuals have the ability to be particularly persuasive in encouraging others to follow their path.

Constant communication will also be key and is vital to ensuring that all staff members are aware of the goals, potential, and details of the service program. Clear communication avoids confusion, addresses concerns, and promotes a sense of shared investment in the success of the program. It will be particularly important to heavily promote successes and achievements—such as the advancement of program goals and the particularly successful actions of talented volunteers—throughout individual agencies and the field.

Finally, agencies should brainstorm other field-specific, agency-specific, or office-specific ways of effectively achieving the goal of managing sea change since work cultures vary.

Create room for innovation

With the introduction of new talent into public-service workplaces and the capability to work across silos, national service has great potential to spur innovation within work fields. Fully realizing this potential, however, will require some strategic planning.

New internal and cross-sector partnerships could be built with the aim of determining how service participants will help to fill gaps in service delivery. It will also be important to build avenues for service participants to innovate into the structure of the program. Equal Justice Works, for example, requires that participants work with host organizations to create their own projects, giving them space to innovate and assume leadership over all aspects of the work.

Consider long-term talent management

National service brings valuable and underutilized talent into public service agencies. But to have maximum impact, it will be important to retain these individuals over the long term by connecting them to career ladders and additional education

National service: Child welfare

Children's Corps is an emerging service model operating in New York City that is patterned after the Teach for America model. Established in 2011 by a nonprofit organization that partners with local child welfare agencies, it aims to develop the child welfare workforce. Participants are largely recent college graduates who commit to serve for two years as caseworkers for families involved in the foster care system.

Targeting a field that has high turnover rates, the founders of Children's Corps were extremely thoughtful in their approach. They went through an exhaustive process of determining what types of qualities are best suited for the job, including holding focus groups with families who had been involved in the child welfare system. The resulting profile

they developed is utilized in the screening of potential candidates for Children's Corps. The program also employs structured mentoring and the development of peer networks. Getting the right people involved in service and providing them with valuable social supports lays a foundation for reducing turnover within the profession.

Some Children's Corps members look to pursue graduate studies in social work with the support of the program, adding another element aimed at workforce development.

Sources: Interview with Barry Chaffkin, Chief Executive Officer, Fostering Change for Children (April 29, 2012); Barry Chaffkin, "It Takes a Village . . .": Fostering Families Today (Windsor, CO: 2011).

and training opportunities. This is especially true for those agencies experiencing human resources challenges that are hindering the mission, such as an aging workforce, high turnover, a dearth of skilled professionals, low enthusiasm, and minimal innovation or creativity, and it will allow them to provide the best possible assistance to those who come to these agencies for help.

Ultimately, agencies facing great challenges in the areas identified above need to rethink what they are doing and develop comprehensive talent-management strategies, of which national service can only be one component—although a potentially important one. But even those agencies that are already doing relatively well with human resources should think about how to best take advantage of the talent coming through their doors via national service.

Here are some questions for agencies engaging national service to consider.

- **Career ladders.** For service participants who may continue working within your agency or your field, have you identified or created sufficient permanent employment opportunities? Have you thought about how those initial employment opportunities could progressively lead to opportunities for advancement? Are you effectively communicating the availability of these career ladders to those who are interested?

- **Training.** Are you developing training protocols that ensure that participants are informed of the various types of work you do throughout your agency and within your field? This will allow participants to fully evaluate whether they may have continued interest in the work. Are you effectively preventing any service participants from working on an isolated task while not gaining a full picture of the work of your field?
- **Education.** Are you creating an environment that is supportive of participants' relevant education and training? Are you providing them with information, advice, and assistance about future education and training opportunities that they may want to pursue in order to excel at your agency or within your field? Are you allowing time within their day for participants to pursue those opportunities if interested? Are you able to connect participants to Segal Education Awards or other scholarship and loan-forgiveness programs that help them with their educational debt? Are you partnering with institutions of higher education in creating your service program? Are students at the local university, for example, your service program participants, and are some considering permanent positions with your agency once they graduate?
- **Mentorship.** Are you ensuring that service participants are involved in effective and organized mentoring with individuals who can answer their questions and provide them with future career advice and assistance if they desire it?

Conclusion

The nation has yet to realize the full potential of national service. Governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations must give more thought to how to use this important tool to help advance their missions and goals. They must invest in national and volunteer service, which has the potential to draw increasing numbers of high-quality talent to public-service fields that are facing significant human resources challenges. Once involved, agencies must give thought to how best to engage those volunteers who show promise and who want to make the work of a field into a career. Ultimately, these investments in people will pay dividends in outcomes: Programs will improve, people and communities will be better served, and societal problems will be solved.

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