

A History of Service

The American Tradition of Service is and always has been a vital force in American life.

Throughout our history, our nation has relied on the dedication and action of citizens.

AmeriCorps is part of a long tradition of service

1930s President Franklin D. Roosevelt creates the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). During the Depression, four million young people help restore the nation's parks, revitalize the economy, and support their families.

1944 The GI Bill links service and education, offering educational opportunity to people who serve the nation during World War II.

1961 President John Kennedy creates the Peace Corps. Since then, more than 150,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers, meeting vital needs overseas and improving America with their new knowledge and spirit of citizenship.

1964 As part of the War on Poverty, President Lyndon B. Johnson creates VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), giving Americans opportunities to serve full-time to help thousands of low-income communities. In 1993, VISTA becomes part of AmeriCorps and is renamed “AmeriCorps*VISTA.”

1960s The Foster Grandparent Program, the Senior Companion Program, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) are created to enable older American to use their experience, skills, and talents to meet community needs. Today, these programs constitute the National Senior Service Corps—which, along with Learn and Serve America, is AmeriCorps’ partner in the Corporation for National Service.

1970s and 1980s Young people get more opportunities to serve, with new local, state, and national programs like youth corps, conservation corps, and service corps. Schools and colleges contribute to the service movement by incorporating service and education.

1990 President George Bush signs the National and Community Service Act of 1990. The legislation authorizes grants to schools to support service-learning and demonstration grants for national service programs to youth corps, nonprofits, and colleges and universities.

1992 With strong bipartisan support, the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is established as part of an amendment to the 1992 Defense Appropriations Bill. The demonstration program is charged with expanding youth service efforts in communities negatively affected by military downsizing.

September 1993 President Bill Clinton signs the ***National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993***, creating AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service. VISTA and NCCC become part of AmeriCorps.

1994 Congress passes the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994, charging the Corporation for National and Community Service with taking the lead in organizing Martin Luther King Day as an annual day of service.

September 1994 The first class of AmeriCorps members—20,000 strong—begins serving in more than 1,000 communities.

April 1997 The Presidents' Summit for America's Future, chaired by General Colin Powell, brings together President Clinton, former Presidents Bush, Ford, and Carter, and Mrs. Reagan to recognize and expand the role of AmeriCorps and other service programs in meeting the needs of America's youth.

October 1999 AmeriCorps marks its five-year anniversary.

October 2000 The ranks of AmeriCorps members grows to more than 175,000. AmeriCorps celebrates the 35th anniversary of VISTA.

January 2002 President George W. Bush creates USA Freedom Corps and calls on all Americans to dedicate at least two years over a lifetime to serving.

2009, in a bipartisan action, Congress passes the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act expanding AmeriCorps to 250,000 members annually by 2017.