

# NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE ARTS

## STRENGTHENING OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTNER WITH NATIONAL SERVICE INITIATIVES

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### ACTION NEEDED

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We urge Congress to:

- **Support the creation of an Artist Corps within the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), similar to the Education Corps, Healthy Futures Corps, Clean Energy Corps, Veterans Corps, and Opportunity Corps. The Artist Corps would support programs administered by, or partnered with, nonprofit community organizations that place skilled artists in the community to address unmet community needs through education, performances and arts-related activities.**
- **Call on CNCS funding guidelines to be more inclusive of community arts projects and nonprofit cultural organizations as eligible national service programs.**

### TALKING POINTS

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- Establishing an Artist Corps would allow individuals trained in the arts to address community needs through arts-related activities. For example, Artist Corps would place artists in programs using the arts to: engage youth in high-risk environments, strengthen civic engagement and community development, increase awareness of the natural environment, enhance the lives of individuals with mental and physical disabilities, and develop cross-cultural understanding. Support for the arts through a dedicated Artist Corps—as well as continued inclusion of the arts in all national service programs—provides an opportunity for creative skills to be utilized in engaging with communities across the country.
- Arts organizations and art-related projects have a proven record of filling unmet community needs through the Corporation for National and Community Service programs:
  - AmeriCorps members have helped to build and administer summer arts camps in rural communities, designed and painted murals in low-income city districts, and strengthened programming at local arts councils.
  - Learn and Serve America has partnered with arts organizations to strengthen arts education and community service education in the public schools.
  - Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) members, under the SeniorCorps Program, have taught art and music to children in afterschool activities.
- National service programs also support job creation in the nonprofit sector. In November 2009, John Podesta, president for the Center of American Progress, wrote that national service programs “have historically driven job creation by providing opportunities for recent college graduates and difficult-to-employ youth, while also building nonprofit organizations’ capacity to continue delivering important social services.”
- New grant programs from CNCS should allow organizations of all sizes to have equal opportunity to compete for funding. The Serve America Act established the Volunteer Generation Fund, the Nonprofit Capacity Building Fund and the Social Innovation Fund. In order for a nonprofit arts organization to engage in and oversee volunteer activity, the current and financially prohibitive funding guidelines should be amended to be inclusive of arts organizations with varying institutional capacity.

### BACKGROUND

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The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is an independent federal agency created to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in volunteer service through three umbrella organizations: AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and Senior Corps. AmeriCorps consists of AmeriCorps\*VISTA, AmeriCorps\*State and National, and AmeriCorps\*NCCC, while Senior Corps consists of the RSVP, Foster Grandparent, and Senior

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## **BACKGROUND (CONTINUED)**

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Companion programs. These service initiatives are administered by an extensive web of national and state offices, governor-appointed state service commissions, and regional offices. Nonprofit art organizations, schools, colleges, and local agencies are all eligible to receive volunteers and/or financial assistance from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The Serve America Act passed by Congress in 2009 acknowledged the important role of the arts in national service programs. The Act states in Sec. 122 (1) (B) (xii) as an eligible activity programs “*providing skilled musicians and artists to promote greater community unity through the use of music and arts education and engagement through work in low-income communities, and education, health care, and therapeutic settings, and other work in the public domain with citizens of all ages.*”

In the 2008 presidential campaign, then-candidate Barack Obama called for the creation of an Artist Corps that would place trained artists in low-income schools and their communities. The efforts of trained artists would be in addition to any certified professionals as the National and Community Trust Act of 1993 calls for programs that meet the unmet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs of the United States, “without displacing existing workers.”

## **EXAMPLES OF ARTS-RELATED RECIPIENTS OF NATIONAL SERVICE SUPPORT**

### **CALIFORNIA—ACLA (formerly ARTScorps), Los Angeles**

AmeriCorps Vista Program, 2008-2009: To support public art and land collective that works with youth in underserved Los Angeles neighborhoods to transform fallow urban land into vibrant, community-directed ArtParks.

### **FLORIDA—ArtSouth and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami**

Florida Learn & Serve Program, 2006–2007: To support the partnership between the nonprofit organization ArtSouth and the Public School system, affecting 4,000 students.

### **MARYLAND—Community Art Corps, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore**

AmeriCorps\*State Grant Recipient, 2003–2007: To partner graduate students from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) with nonprofit arts organizations throughout the Baltimore area to create art-oriented programs for youth and residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods.

### **NEBRASKA—Lincoln Arts Council, Lincoln**

AmeriCorps Vista Program, 2005-2010: To support arts programming and community outreach initiatives at the Lincoln Arts Council including artist residency programs for underserved youth and elders and the indexing of New American artists in the community.

### **NEW MEXICO—VSA arts North Fourth Arts Center, Albuquerque**

AmeriCorps\*State Grant Recipient, 2000-2008: To help 26 AmeriCorps\*State volunteers serve as artist-teachers and assistance artist-teachers that use creative expression to enhance the lives of individuals with mental and physical disabilities and the elderly.