SERVICE YEAR℠

SERVICE YEAR ALLIANCE

Advocacy Toolkit

About the Advocacy Toolkit

Thank you for being a leader in the service year movement! This advocacy toolkit is intended to empower leaders like you with some of the tools and resources you need to be a savvy, successful advocate. If you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to your Regional Field Director.

Thank you for leading the fight. When we are successful in making a year of service part of growing up in America, it will be because of you.

About Service Year Alliance

Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. A service year before, during, or after college – or as a way to get back on track – gives young people the chance to develop their skills, make an impact on the lives of others, and become the active citizens and leaders our nation needs. Expanding service years has the power to revitalize cities, uplift and educate children at risk, and empower communities struggling with poverty. It can unite the most diverse nation in history, binding people of different backgrounds through common cause. Service Year Alliance is asking nonprofits, higher education institutions, cities and states, companies and foundations, policymakers of both parties, and people of all ages to join the movement.

Learn more at LetUsServe.org

Table of Contents

How to Call your Member Of Congress 3

How to Write your Member of Congress 4

How to Meet With your Member of Congress 5

How to Bird-Dog your Member of Congress 7

How To Submit A Letter to the Editor 8

2018 Talking Points for Service Years 10

How to: Call Your Member of Congress

Calling your member of Congress is one of the most impactful ways to make your voice heard. Congressional offices track every call they get from constituents. When done in concert with thousands of people across the country, it has the power to advance the service year agenda and expand opportunities for young people to serve around the world. It's not nearly as intimidating as it might seem and it only takes a couple minutes of your time.

Here's how to go about calling your Member of Congress:

- *Find your Senator's contact information here* or *Representative's contact information here.*
  - **Service Year Alliance usually emails out a call action with a click-to-call tool. Whenever possible, use the click-to-call tool because it makes it easy for us to track the number of calls made to each office.**
  - It's best to call your elected officials' Washington, D.C. office because it's the most direct connection to federal legislation.
  - Call between 8am–5pm ET
  - If the voicemail is full, contact the local office or try back again during office hours.
  - Check-in with your Regional Field Director to ensure you're using the latest call script and talking points. See sample below!
- **An intern or staff assistant will answer the phone**-- not the Senator/ Representative! Tell them you're name and the town/ city you're calling from.
- **Report your call** to your Regional Field Director especially if you learned any valuable information about where your member of Congress stands on the issue. This helps our team in Washington, D.C. effectively follow-up with their office later.

Sample Call Script

"Hi, my name is [NAME] and I'm calling from [TOWN], [STATE]. I'm calling to ask [THE SENATOR/ CONGRESSMEN] to support expanding national service programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild so that every young American has an opportunity to serve. I care about national service because [INSERT PERSONAL STORY HERE]. Thank you very much for your time."

Best Practices

- **Know your facts before you call.** Read over Service Year Alliance's action alert or background information before you dial. You can also contact your Regional Field Director to go over any questions you might have about current legislation.
- **Clearly identify yourself as a constituent.** Give your name, your city, and identify yourself as a member of Service Year Alliance. You might also share any other relevant affiliations you have (service year alumnus, church, school, etc.)
- **Stay on message**. Your call will be short so use your time wisely to convey your key points.

How to: Write Your Member of Congress

Over 100,000,000 emails are sent to Congress every year and most of them are impersonal form letters. Not surprisingly, the research available shows that as the volume of communication goes up, so does the efficacy of thoughtful handwritten letters or personalized emails. Just take this reflection from a congressional staffer:

> *"One hundred form letters have less direct value than a single thoughtful letter generated by a constituent of the Member's district."*

Even *local elected officials* attest that this personal approach gets results in the digital age.

Here are a few simple things you can do to make sure that your letter stands out and your concerns are communicated clearly:

- **Include your name and address.** Also include any title or affiliation that you are comfortable sharing. This demonstrates your connection to a wider circle of constituents and potential voters. You are writing to politicians, after all!
- **Personalize your message**. Pre-written letters or emails are easily detectable and less effective.
- **Be concise.** An effective letter can be as short as two paragraphs. Keep it to one page max.
- **Offer to be a resource.** You can position yourself as a reliable voice amid the din of those vying for your elected officials' attention. Remember, they can't be experts on every issue.
- **Request specific action.** When possible, give the name of pending legislation or specific bill numbers you want them to cosponsor or vote for, and mention the bill's status in the legislative process.
- **Give reasons why.** Share a personal story about what motivates you to write. Then cite one or two compelling facts that show how expanding national service will have a transformative effect on our communities and world.
- **Say thank you.** Thank your member of Congress for something, preferably a positive action they've taken with regard to a past or present national service issue. If you can't find anything to thank them for, at least acknowledge they have a tough job.
- **Report out.** As always, be sure to report your action to your Regional Field Director.

How to:
Meet With Your Member of Congress

A meeting with your member of Congress is one of the most effective ways that you as a service year advocate can make your voice heard and urge your elected officials to act.

Scheduling Your Meeting

- **Reach out to your Regional Field Director and let them know you'd like to meet with your member of Congress.** Our team will provide a customized briefing on the elected officials you'd like to meet and equip you with the latest talking points or information about our campaign. You can research your member of Congress at govtrack.us.
- **Determine where to go.** Constituents can schedule meetings at their office in Washington, D.C. or in one of their district offices.
- **Call the office to determine the best way to set up a meeting.** Some staff members will take the request on the phone; most will direct you to the website or email to receive a written request. You can follow this simple script:

  "Hello, my name is [NAME] and I'm a constituent in [CITY/ STATE]. I'd like to schedule a meeting with [SENATOR/ REPRESENTATIVE] and am calling to find out the best way to submit a meeting request."

- **Submit your written request:**

  "Dear [SENATOR/ REPRESENTATIVE],

  My name is [NAME] and I'm writing as a constituent from [CITY] who is passionate about national service. I would like to request an in-district meeting with you to discuss what the U.S. is doing to increase opportunities for young Americans to serve a year. I hope you're available to meet with us, but if not, we'd love to meet with the appropriate member of your staff. I will follow-up by phone to ensure this request is received.

  Very best,

  [NAME], [PHONE NUMBER], [EMAIL ADDRESS]

- **Follow-up:** If you haven't heard from the Congressional office in one week, give them a call to ensure they received your request.

Before the Meeting

- **Practice.** Bring your community team, campus team, or other volunteers who are planning to join you together to practice your roles and identify who is going to say what. Remember to wear your Service Year Alliance t-shirts so you're recognizable in the future.

At the Meeting

- **Kick-off the meeting.** Have everyone in the group introduce themselves. The group leader should give an introduction to Service Year Alliance:

Talking Points:

> *"Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. "*
>
> *"We don't receive federal funding and we don't run service programs on the ground. We're about catalyzing the supply of service year positions (through policy, advocacy, and growth in local communities), increasing awareness and demand among young people (through consumer marketing campaigns), and building the movement we need to be successful."*
>
> *"When we refer to a "service year" we mean a full-time position where young people can build real-world skills through hands-on service with national service programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild."*

- **Tell your story.** Why is national service important to you? Talk about your personal connection to the issue.
- **Explain why the issue is important.** Contact your Regional Field Director for specific talking points on our latest campaign objectives.
- **Make the ask.** Close the meeting by making a specific ask. For example:

> *"We understand that you need to make tough budget decisions. However, national service yields a triple bottom line: uniting Americans of all backgrounds, offering a transformative opportunity for young people who serve, and bringing unprecedented skills and willpower to partner with communities in need. Please prioritize funding for national service programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild so that one day a year of service becomes part of growing up in America."*

- Hand-deliver written letters, postcards, or petitions that you've collected in your community.
- Thank the member of Congress (or their staff) for taking the time to meet with you and discuss national service.
- Take a photo with the member of Congress or their staff and we'll promote your engagement.
- Report your meeting to your Regional Field Director. We want to hear all about it!

How to:
Bird-dog Your Member of Congress

Originally a hunting term, "bird-dogging" an elected official refers to the process of pinning them down to hear their views on an issue and get them on the record.

Bird-dogging Best Practices

- **Find out where the elected official/candidate will be and when.** Sign-up for your target's newsletter for upcoming events and constituent meetings. Ahead of a recess, call the elected official's office and ask for his public schedule.
- **Check in with your Regional Field Director.** They can brief you on the elected official's position on our issue, recommend an appropriate ask, and make sure you have the latest talking points on our campaign.
- **Arrive early.** This is to ensure you get the best seat at the event or are in the first row of the rope line.
- **Bring a friend.** Working in teams of two or four is helpful-- you can disperse in the audience and increase your chances of being called on. Whomever is not called on can use their phone to record your question and the elected official's response to get them officially on the record.
- **Have your question ready.** Your Regional Field Director can provide a sample and help with framing your question.
- **Improvise as necessary.** If your question is asked by someone else or doesn't seem relevant to the subject being discussed, pivot and ask another question.
- **Smile and raise your hand.** Asking your question early increases your chance of connecting with your target.
- **Take notes.** If you weren't able to get your target's response on video, try to capture it by hand.
- **Be prepared to speak to media.** Journalists often attend town halls and constituent meetings and will ask to interview voters who ask interesting questions. Work with your Regional Field Director to ensure you have your pitch down.
- **Report your engagement.** Follow-up with your Regional Field Director.

How to: Submit a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

A letter to the editor (LTE) of your local publication is one of the most effective ways to raise the profile of service years in your community and make your voice heard. Congressional staff and members of Congress famously read the editorial pages of local papers to keep their fingers on the pulse of the voters in their districts and states.

Here are a few tips to increase your chances of getting your LTE published:

- **Work with a Service Year Alliance team member:** Your local Regional Field Director or a member of our communications team can help provide feedback and offer support. Make sure you keep them in the loop and send them a copy of your submission.
- **Check the rules for LTE submission:** Publications usually have specific rules for publishing, like word length, format, and contact information. They will reject letters that don't follow their guidelines so be sure to double-check.
- **Keep it short:** Stay within the publication's word count guidelines and make your point quickly. Shorter letters are often more effective.
- **Tell your story:** Why do you care about expanding service year opportunities?
- **Make a clear call to action:** LTEs are effective because they inspire people to take action. Make a clear ask of your lawmaker, candidates, or community members.
- **Double-check your spelling and grammar**: Letters with errors are unlikely to be published. Have a friend, colleague, or Service Year Alliance team member proofread your draft before you submit.
- **Once you submit, keep an eye out:** Not all publications let authors know they've been published.
- **So you've been published-- CONGRATS!** Your voice has been heard. Now let's amplify it! Send your letter to your friends, family, colleagues, and your Service Year Alliance contact. Share on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media channels. Don't forget to use #serviceyear!
- **Follow-up with your target member of Congress.** Ensure the right policymaker sees your LTE by sending it to their office with a brief cover note asking for a response.

LTE Outline

- **Describe the issue/ challenge you are writing to address:** Why are you personally concerned?
- **Describe the solution:** Why service years? Why now? Describe it in a way that makes it easy for readers to understand.
- **Call to action:** Who are you targeting (ex. name of your member of Congress) and what are you calling on them to do (ex. expand service year opportunities).

EXAMPLE:

Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

There is no doubt the 115th Congress is facing a variety of challenges. They need plans to fight poverty, address the high school dropout crisis, and tackle crippling student debt. Service year programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild provide creative solutions to these and many of the critical issues facing our country, all while uniting Americans in a shared sense of purpose.

In my home state of [STATE], [# of AMERICORPS MEMBERS] AmeriCorps members serve with local organizations like [NAME OF ORG] [IMPACT OF ORG]. These members mobilize [STATE]'s human capital every day to meet local needs and solve local problems. It's a smart investment for our state that produces real results – for every $1 spent invested in national service, AmeriCorps delivers nearly $4 in services to cities and towns all across the nation.

Additionally, at a time of great political division, expanding service year opportunities may be the one thing we can all agree on. 83% of Republicans and Democrats believe we should maintain or increase the federal investment in service. While only 66,000 young Americans serve annually today, research indicates that up to 5 million would be ready to serve if given the opportunity. This is a smart investment in our country and our citizen's future.

I urge Congress to expand service year opportunities and make national service a top priority.

Sincerely,

NAME

TITLE/ORGANIZATION

TOWN

2018 Talking Points

Use these talking points to frame your advocacy actions.

General

- Identify yourself as a volunteer/Community Team Leader/Community Team member with Service Year Alliance.
- Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. We don't receive federal funding and we don't run service year programs on the ground. We're about catalyzing the supply of service year positions (through policy, advocacy, and growth in local communities), increasing awareness and demand among young people (through consumer marketing campaigns), and building the movement we need to be successful.
- Are you a service year alum? Mention your personal story of service.

What is a service year?

- A service year is a paid opportunity to develop real-world skills through hands-on service. Whether you serve before, during, or after college – or as a way to find your path – a service year gives young people a chance to transform their lives, make an impact in their community, and become the active citizens and leaders our nation needs.
- Expanding service years has the power to revitalize cities, uplift and educate children at risk, and empower communities struggling with poverty.

Describing the service year movement

- Movements have been the greatest drivers of political and social change since the American Revolution. Service Year Alliance is building a national movement to increase political support for expanding service year opportunities and inspire the next generation to serve – the movement that service at scale requires. Using a proven organizing model, we are building grassroots power, empowering leaders to become service year champions, and demonstrating a constituency for service in target districts and states across the country.

2018 Talking Points, cont.

Why young people should consider a service year? (A Better You.)

- Service years provide real world experience needed to connect educational goals to career goals.
- Service years empower you to become a better leader early on making you more competitive in your academic or career path.
- Service years increase higher education access and completion.
- Service years expose young Americans to new ideas and ways of thinking.
- Service years build independence, confidence, and efficacy.
- Service years clarify personal goals and purpose.
- You get paid and in most cases earn an education award to pay for college or pay off student loans.

Why policymakers should support service years? (A Greater Us.)

- National service is an issue that has always enjoyed broad, bipartisan support because it yields a triple bottom line: uniting Americans of all backgrounds, offering a transformative opportunity for young people who serve, and bringing unprecedented skills and willpower to partner with communities in need.
- 83% of Republicans and Democrats believe we should maintain or increase the federal investment in national service.
- Service years have the power to:
- Unleash the talent and idealism of young Americans to help tackle our greatest community challenges in education, health, poverty, and more.
- Increase higher education access and completion.
- Provide a pathway to career by developing 21st century skills.
- Build bridges and unite Americans of all backgrounds.
- Develop the next generation of our country's leaders.
- Build the habits of civic engagement and leadership.

Examples of service year programs:

- **AmeriCorps.** AmeriCorps is a network of local, state, and national service programs that connects over 65,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet community needs in education, the environment, public safety, health, and homeland security. AmeriCorps members serve with more than 2,000 nonprofits, public agencies, and community organizations. There have been 1 million AmeriCorps members to date.
    - Notable programs include VISTA, National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), City Year and Teach for America.
- **Peace Corps.** Peace Corps is a service opportunity for motivated changemakers to immerse themselves in a community abroad, working side by side with local leaders to tackle the most pressing challenges of our generation.
- **YouthBuild.** Youthbuild is a nonprofit organization which provides low-income young adults who left school without a diploma an opportunity to earn their degree, learn job skills, transform their lives, get back on track to adult responsibility, and give back to their communities.

2018 Talking Points, cont.

Service years utilize human capital to solve some of our nation's and communities' toughest challenges.

Service years are cost effective.

- Every federal dollar invested in AmeriCorps is matched by more than $2 from donations and in-kind support from private sources.
- In 2015, $1.26 billion in outside resources was generated from private businesses, foundations, and other sources - an amount exceeding the federal investment.
- In a time when our federal government is operating under a tight fiscal environment, service years are a cost-effective and outcomes-driven solution to solving challenges in states and communities throughout the country.
- Federal agencies can utilize service year corps members to perform duties that align with agency missions at a low cost. States and local communities can utilize corps members to address local challenges or crises and to revitalize and rebuild communities.
- FEMA Corps saves $60 million annually by using service year corps members.

Service years lead to education success.

- Service years completed through AmeriCorps help pay for higher education by providing access to education scholarships that can be used to pay for college tuition or to pay down student loan debt. To date, AmeriCorps alums have earned more than $3.3 billion to help with college costs.
- More than $1 billion of scholarship funds have gone to repay students loans.
- Service year corps members in AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps may also be eligible for forbearance or deferment of their federal student loans during their service.

Service years address local challenges.

- Three-quarters of AmeriCorps funding is managed by Governor-appointed State Service Commissions.
- Service years reduce crime.
- AmeriCorps members serving through Wayne State reduced crime in midtown Detroit by more than 50 percent by combining crime mapping analysis with neighborhood organizing.
- In neighborhoods where AmeriCorps members serve, crime has declined by 25 percent, saving law enforcement an estimated $302 million.

Service empower veterans

- Thousands of veterans are improving their own communities by doing service years after their military service through programs like The Mission Continues, which is taking on youth hunger.
- Service years allow veterans to continue their service at home, providing a smoother transition to civilian life.

2018 Talking Points, cont.

Service years lift-up at-risk students.

- AmeriCorps has connected over 20,500 at-risk students in low-performing schools to STEM opportunities.
- AmeriCorps tutors with Minnesota Reading Corps helped four and five-year-old students meet or exceed targets for kindergarten readiness in five key literacy benchmarks compared to only one for students in comparison classrooms.
- More than 3,500 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members teach, tutor, or support at-risk students in 720 charter schools across the country.
- Reading Partners AmeriCorps members provide one-on-one tutoring to 10,900 struggling readers in 208 low-income elementary schools across the country.
- In Madison, Wisconsin, AmeriCorps members organized volunteers to tutor in local schools who helped to eliminate racial disparities in reading.

Service years respond to crises.

- AmeriCorps NCCC members deployed to respond to Flint, Michigan's water crisis, going door-to-door with deliveries of water, filters and replacement filters, and water-test kits.
- After the Louisiana floods, 1,390 AmeriCorps members have rebuilt 600 homes and provided shelter, meals, and supplies to 62,305 flood survivors.

Service years restore the environment and reduce carbon emissions.

- Opportunity youth serving in Earth Conservation Corps returned the Bald Eagle to the Anacostia River and educated thousands of Washington, DC, children about environmental stewardship.
- AmeriCorps members in Green City Force learned green job skills while performing energy audits in low-income homes and taking other measures to reduce energy use.

Service years clear the way to employment.

- Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps members expunged and sealed criminal records and removed other legal barriers to employment for more than 1000 economically disadvantaged job seekers.
- AmeriCorps members have connected 25,000 Eastern Kentucky residents to job training and placement services, including hundreds of unemployed coal miners.