



The Case for National Service as a Solution to Critical Contact Tracing Needs

Overview

According to public health experts, in order to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus and move the country out of this pandemic, we must massively ramp up a national testing and contact tracing effort in America, with at least 100,000 additional people participating in contact tracing efforts to identify and inform people who have been exposed to someone with the infectious disease (sentiments cited from both [Harvard University](#) and [John Hopkins](#)). Every day, the need for contact tracing is in the headlines, as individualized efforts surface to attempt to fund, recruit, train, and mobilize contact tracers on a local scale. Ultimately, the expansive needs across the country call for scalable solutions.

Solving dual public health and economic crises requires significant human power. With unemployment soaring and public health agencies under-resourced, national service can help mobilize hundreds of thousands of individuals who are unemployed into meaningful work and bring much-needed capacity to our communities in order to support the public health community's recovery efforts, all while creating a pipeline into public health careers to boost a sector in need.

The Case for National Service

National service is a paid opportunity to serve our country and address community needs. National service programs like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and YouthBuild address three things at once: they transform lives through skill development; they address pressing community needs (in this case, contact tracing); and they fuel civic renewal by bringing people together in service to our country. National service has also shown to be a [cost effective way](#) to meet community needs while also ensuring that the people who serve gain leadership and professional skills that enhance their future education and careers.

National service has a history of playing a critical role in America's long-term recovery after crises. Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the Great Depression — mobilizing millions of unemployed Americans to tend to our public lands and conserve our natural resources — and George W. Bush expanded AmeriCorps by fifty percent and increased Peace Corps participation following the 9/11 attacks. Our country is currently in need of a mass mobilization of Americans who want to serve our communities and help our

country recover in the wake of this pandemic. Just as we've seen national service in action after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, in response to wildfires in the Pacific West, and in the rebuilding of cities like Flint, MI — national service can also be part of the solution by boosting contact tracing in response to the coronavirus.

With over 25 million people out of work, expanding national service programs that specifically support the coronavirus contact tracing effort can help put Americans back to work while simultaneously addressing the public health crisis we face.

In order for national service to be successfully utilized to support contact tracing efforts, however, the necessary training is required to set corps members up for success. Public health agencies — like the federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state and local departments of Health and Human Services agencies, and local health departments — are on the front lines of this crisis and have the best understanding of community needs and the types of training that is required to meet those needs.

How to Implement National Service for Contact Tracing

To implement national service as a strategy for contact tracing, we will need the full partnership and pooled resources of national service programs and public health agencies. National service programs and public health agencies will need to create partnerships to provide the manpower (national service) with training and structures (public health agencies) along with government and, ideally, private foundation dollars to make this an effective strategy.

Here are the partners that need to be in alignment:

- National: CDC, CNCS, U.S. Congress, private foundations, and partners like National League of Cities and National Association of Counties
- State: Governors, state service commissions, national service programs, state health agencies, and private foundations
- Local: County executives, mayors, local public health agencies, local national service programs, and private foundations.

Additionally, to make this concept a reality, Service Year Alliance is recommending that the aforementioned partners utilize ServiceYear.org. ServiceYear.org is being fully deployed alongside national and local recruitment campaigns to match as many interested individuals with in-demand service year opportunities during this time. Also, the built-in certification process on ServiceYear.org allows for quick approval and posting of opportunities, regardless of funding source. Utilizing a technology platform such as ServiceYear.org will allow the national service field to rapidly expand due to potential increased funding for national service opportunities and will allow for a faster and more efficient way to mobilize Americans into service.

National Service Contact Tracing Models

There are multiple opportunities to mobilize service year corps members to assist with contact tracing within local communities. Corps members could participate directly in contact tracing efforts, or they could serve as volunteer managers or capacity builders in local public health agencies.

1. **Contact Tracing Direct Response Corps:** This corps would recruit, train, and mobilize service year corps members who are ready and willing to serve as contact tracers to safely conduct contact tracing for local communities and connect those in isolation to local resources.
 - This model would allow for the deployment of individuals out of work or who have had their service disrupted due to coronavirus to aid directly in contact tracing. Individuals would complete the centralized training and then be mobilized to cover the needs of a public health department/CDC to conduct contact tracing for a given jurisdiction.
2. **Contact Tracing Volunteer Managers:** This corps would recruit, train, and mobilize service year corps members to serve as volunteer managers for contact tracers so that we can also harness the power of community volunteers in an organized and supported way.
 - This model would deploy service year corps members into capacity building positions as volunteer managers and trainers alongside additional funding to public health agencies in local communities.
 - Mobilizing these individuals as Volunteer Managers allows the public investment to scale through the safe mobilization of volunteers to do the contact tracing and potentially limits the need for extensive training.
3. **Public Health Capacity Builders:** This corps would recruit and mobilize service year corps members to serve in local public health agencies and to develop their capacity to move from response to recovery, which may include oversight of contract tracing efforts, or other identified needs.
 - This model pairs the need to get funds to local public health agencies with the need to mobilize individuals with capacity and training to adequately take on local contact tracing needs. Additionally, bringing in corps members focused on capacity building also allows them to understand and address the local needs of public health agencies.
 - Mobilizing these individuals as Public Health Capacity Builders allows for the same individuals or a set of them to additionally focus on the other capacity needs of the public health agencies in response to COVID-19.

There are four models for developing each of these corps:

1. Establish a partnership where CDC (or other relevant public health entity) provides emergency funding to state or local agencies as well as centralized training/expertise for a *newly formed AmeriCorps model* to provide the infrastructure for corps specially designed to provide this service, either through state commissions and/or CNCS.
2. Establish a partnership where CDC (or other relevant entity) provides emergency funding to state or local agencies as well as centralized training/expertise *for currently serving corps members who need to be redeployed into safe and in-demand service activities*. This assumes appropriate adjustments to restrictions on current service/grants, including waivers for AmeriCorps match and the cap on training hours.
3. Establish a new *service year fellowship model*, potentially even as a pilot, that would allow for individuals to be awarded fellowships and then to be matched with certified nonprofits, or public entities for their service year. Oversight and authority for granting the fellowships could come from state commissions and/or CNCS. Whereas the certification of nonprofits and matching of fellows with service year opportunities could be done using the existing technology of ServiceYear.org, and in close partnership with state commissions and CNCS.
4. Establish a *newly funded corps* that adds more service years and is based out of an agency already set up to distribute funds to state or local public health entities, such as the CDC (or other relevant public health entities). These positions could be certified through ServiceYear.org for a quick, surge mobilization while ensuring a national service standard.

Of the outlined models, Service Year Alliance believes that a partnership between the CDC and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) — the federal agency that manages AmeriCorps — is the best way to mobilize national service corps members at a large scale to support contact tracing efforts at a national level.

Service Year Alliance is also currently exploring options to utilize national service for contact tracing at the state, county, or city level through conversations with state Health and Human Service agencies, state service commissions, and the National Association of Counties and the National League of Cities.

All models rely on a centralized set of expertise to provide extensive virtual training for contact tracing, background on the virus, volunteer management best-practices, volunteer safety guidelines, best-practices for virtual tools, background on national service, and overview of their benefits and responsibilities.

Policy Progress

Service Year Alliance is supportive of all of the various national service proposals outlined below that are moving on Capitol Hill at the moment. We are eager to work with policymakers on immediate emergency relief and economic recovery solutions that mobilize our existing workforce, support our public health communities' response efforts, and help put Americans back to work. We are prepared to advise policymakers on the most efficient and effective ways to utilize national service to support these measures, specifically as they relate to contact tracing.

[National Public Health Corps](#): Representatives Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA), Ami Bera (D-CA), Susan Brooks (R-IN) and Bill Foster (D-IL) have proposed the bipartisan creation of a National Public Health Corps that would mobilize national service corps members to provide our state and local health departments with much needed support for contact tracing and a national testing initiative. This bill was directly influenced by Service Year Alliance's proposed contact tracing corps models and includes specific recommendations from Service Year Alliance. A version of this concept is included in the Senate's Pandemic Response and Opportunity Through National Service Act.

UNITE Act: Proposed by [Senators Ed Markey \(D-MA\) and Chris Van Hollen \(D-MD\)](#) in the Senate and [Rep. Dean Phillips \(D-MN\)](#) in the House, these very similar bills aim to increase AmeriCorps from 75,000 to 500,000 opportunities a year in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Contact tracing is one way in which the 500,000 AmeriCorps members could be utilized in COVID-19 response efforts.

[Pandemic Response and Opportunity Through National Service Act](#): Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.) and colleagues announced the introduction of legislation to expand national service programs to 750,000 AmeriCorps opportunities per year as the country works to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill calls for a partnership between AmeriCorps and the CDC to provide additional response surge capacity that could be deployed to specific areas as needed — similar to what is proposed in the Houlahan/Bera National Public Health Corps concept.

[Health Force](#): Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) announced new legislation aimed at hiring hundreds of thousands of new public health workers into a "Health Force," modeled after New Deal programs during the Great Depression. This legislation is part of Sen. Coons' proposed larger Pandemic Response and Opportunity Through National Service Act and Service Year Alliance has been in talks with Sens. Gillibrand and Bennet's offices to discuss how to incorporate national service into this specific proposal.



[Containment Corps](#): Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Representative Andy Levin (D-Mich.) introduced a plan to create a "containment corps" that would carry out a national coronavirus contact tracing program. The plan does not currently include national service but Service Year Alliance is in conversations with both offices to discuss incorporating national service as part of the proposed corps concept.

How to Get Involved

- Are you a policymaker looking for advice, feedback, or guidance for potential legislation?
- Are you a public health agency that wants to connect with your local national service agencies and/or programs?
- Are you a national service agency or program that is interested in creating a contact tracing corps or exploring ways to utilize corps members in contact tracing?
- Are you a funder who is interested in the potential of investing in national service to boost contact tracing efforts?

To get involved, please contact Aly Ferguson at aferguson@serviceyear.org.

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. To achieve our mission, Service Year Alliance develops and documents evidence in priority focus areas to persuade decision makers to increase public and private investments in the service year ecosystem. We build coalitions and foster strategic corporate, community, and research partnerships and develop service year programs and resources in priority focus areas to strengthen the case for service years. We advance policy proposals that unlock public funds for service years to create the opportunity for all young Americans to serve. We elevate service years as an experience that transforms lives, strengthens communities, and fuels civic renewal. Finally, we manage ServiceYear.org, a technology platform that matches those who want to serve with paid service year opportunities. Learn more at ServiceYearAlliance.org.