



April 19, 2018

National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
Attn: RFI COMMENT – Docket 05-2018-01
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000, Room 1029
Arlington, VA 22202

Agency/Docket Number: 05-2018-01 - Request for Information on Improving the Military Selective Service Process and Increasing Participation in Military, National, and Public Service
Document Number: 2018-03261

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service on how to improve and increase participation in military, national, and public service.

The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) was established in 1979 and is a US national not-for-profit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) and one of the largest organizations supporting projects that revitalize communities and bring greater economic opportunity to residents. These include investments in businesses, affordable housing, better schools, safer streets, and programs that improve the financial outlook of families. LISC mobilizes corporate, government, and philanthropic support to provide local community development organizations with loans, grants, and equity investments; technical assistance; and policy support. Our work impacts the lives of millions of Americans in both rural areas and urban centers across the country. LISC operates in 31 cities through our local office network, and partners with 86 different organizations that service over 2,000 rural counties in 44 states throughout the country.

LISC has operated an AmeriCorps program for 23 years to recruit passionate, dedicated people to serve with community development groups in neighborhoods where we work. Nearly 70% of our members live in the community that they serve as an AmeriCorps member. Our members serve a vital, three-fold purpose: 1) to serve the organizations where they are placed and spearhead valuable projects which otherwise would not be undertaken; 2) to engage local residents in the revitalization of their own neighborhoods; and 3) to develop and deepen their personal civic engagement values and gain skills necessary to secure employment post service.

Over 3,000 members have served in more than 80 cities and rural areas. LISC AmeriCorps members perform critical services including but not limited to: financial counseling, job placement, housing development and foreclosure prevention. Through service, members engage and empower neighbors to improve the safety, health, and vitality of their communities. To date, members have been instrumental in: helping to develop over 10,000 affordable housing units; providing homeownership/foreclosure prevention counseling to over 51,000 people; helping 26,000 clients with services leading to 7,500 individuals securing employment; and recruiting and managing over 157,000 volunteers to serve nearly 730,000 hours of community service. Depending on the local needs of these communities, LISC and our strategic community development partners evaluate where AmeriCorps members can be valuable leaders. In turn, members serve with a sense of patriotism as one way of giving back to their community and country.

Addressing Needs of the Nation

The United States can increase participation in military, national, and public service by recruiting individuals with skills critical to address the national security and other public service needs of the nation.

It can work especially if individuals are matched with meaningful service opportunities. For example, coupling national service with rebuilding neighborhood infrastructure post natural disasters during recovery efforts has demonstrated results. On a larger agency scale, the continued disaster relief work, such as the service of National Citizen Conservation Corps (NCCC) and FEMA Corps teams, is an important and much needed first response when communities are hit with a natural disaster and when continuous investment in these resources is necessary. However, at a local level – once the initial “muck and gut” work has been done – there is a next phase need for community resilience. In both spaces, AmeriCorps members can play a vital role.

It has been reported that Hurricane Harvey rebuilding efforts were hampered by a lack of skilled construction labor and service providers. Coupled with the trauma of residents trying to rebuild and remain employed, it generates an environment where civic engagement and AmeriCorps can play a significant role through the expansion and replication of results driven programs. One such program is LISC’s extensive Financial Opportunity Centers (FOC) network. LISC’s FOCs clients receive bundled services such as financial counseling, employment services and low-cost financial products that help build credit, savings and assets. Centers seek to provide local residents with job training and employment career development – such as in the construction trades – as a means to build family self-sufficiency, lessen the dependence on government programs, and lower the unemployment rate. LISC’s AmeriCorps members have been critical in addressing issues of financial stability and job readiness training throughout this network already. Members have served clients, who are hard-to-employ, with job readiness workshops, career coaching, and job placement services. This approach, which addresses basic needs with a longer term self-sufficiency strategy, can benefit the nation and see even greater results with an increased investment.

Eliminating Barriers to Service

In seeking to increase participation in military, national or public service, it will require a concerted effort to break down the barriers that exist that seek to limit participation.

One barrier is the lack of AmeriCorps brand recognition and understanding that it is a national service program. Although Americans overwhelmingly support national service, as indicated by a recent TargetPoint poll, it is not as well known that national service also benefits the participants of the AmeriCorps program. For example, in programs such as LISC's, we provide a unique offering to 'returning citizens' as a pathway to avoid recidivism. An AmeriCorps member contributes meaningful benefits to their neighborhood while they receive the skills and opportunity to build their resume needed for future employment opportunities. Indeed, in the last full year of service operations (2015-2016), LISC AmeriCorps members who had a criminal record could be characterized by this statement: "The typical LISC AmeriCorps member who has a criminal record is a 36 year old African American male without a degree supporting a 3 person household on less than \$10K per year. He has lived in the community he is serving for 10+ years." At the end of the service term when polled for employability, of those who successfully completed service 63% of this cohort subset was able to secure employment in the not-for-profit/ government sector or returned for a second term of service.ⁱ

A second barrier is the stipend payment to members. AmeriCorps programs have a financial matching requirement; at LISC, our program matches the Federal investment at a reported rate of \$1.60 for every dollar received. With rising costs for mandatory health care, grant oversight and management, etc., the living stipend needs to increase to an amount that affords individuals to be able to meet basic needs – rent, food, transportation. Being able to provide a reasonable living stipend would assist with increasing program participation, member retention and, by extension, community benefit outcomes.

The Value of Service

National service has an inherent value.

Members serve for a variety of reasons and for many it is life-changing. More than that, service and hiring alums at US based small businesses and corporations lends a competitive edge. In a recent LISC article, we profiled three alums, including Amy Millington, eBay Foundation's president and 1994 LISC AmeriCorps member. She served with a Los Angeles affordable housing developer and then managed an AmeriCorps program. She noted, "It was a great launching pad." The article went on to say: *"More than that, Millington's service left her convinced that working together—'proximity and experience,' as she calls it—can foster empathy among people, whatever their backgrounds. And it gave her a sense of possibility that helps guide her work at the eBay Foundation overseeing employee community engagement activities along with millions in grants and impact investments: 'I bring those early experiences, seeing how meaningful human potential is and the power of economic opportunity, into the work that we do.'"*

A study by AmeriCorps alums completed by Abt Associates and JBS International found that 79% of alumni are or plan to become actively involved in community post service, compared to

47% prior. In addition, eight out of ten alumni say AmeriCorps benefitted their career path. Further findings indicated “AmeriCorps service is found to have a significant positive effect on civic engagement; respondents were more likely to engage in all community service activities asked about in the survey post-AmeriCorps compared to pre-AmeriCorps. There was also a positive effect seen on sense of community, cultural competency and measures of self-efficacy. The study found that AmeriCorps service had significant effects on alumni’s employment and career pathways. For example, AmeriCorps alumni are more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree or higher than the average American adult.” All of these findings are key components of what employers look for when hiring as they are indicators of employee engagement.

Employee engagement is critical to businesses and it impacts corporate bottom lines every year. LISC trains and nurtures individuals to be mindful leaders in both public and private sectors because we understand the importance of meaningful employee engagement to our economy. In a 2012 Gallup poll, “Organizations that score in the top half of employee engagement have double the odds of success of those in the bottom half. Not only that, but those at the 99th percentile of engagement have *four times* the success rate.”ⁱⁱ National service participants learn engagement and how jobs are not the ‘standard nine-to-fiver’ while at the same time finding ways to contribute to their local community – from volunteering at the local food bank to helping a neighbor shovel a driveway out after a snowstorm. Employee engagement and training/hiring people for vacancies in our changing economy will be a strategic move to position the US in the international business community.

In conclusion, national service is an investment in those who serve, the non-profits who benefit from additional capacity, and communities where they serve. Investments in the AmeriCorps program result in more engaged citizens, greater economic opportunity, less dependence of government, safer neighborhoods, stronger communities, workforce development, and a stronger nation.

We thank the Commission for this opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt L. Josephs", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matt Josephs
Senior Vice President for Policy

CC: Alexander M. “Sandy” Scott, Senior Advisor to the CEO, Corporation for National and Community Service

ⁱ For comparison, the full 2015-2016 cohort was typified by this statement: “The typical LISC AmeriCorps member is a 31 year old female of color with at least an AA supporting a 2.6 person household on less than \$30K per year. She has lived in the community she is serving for 10+ years. 57% of members who completed service became employed in the sector.”

ⁱⁱ <https://www.fastcompany.com/3009012/the-costs-of-ignoring-employee-engagement>