

3-1997

## National Service: Expectation Versus Reality

Robert D. Shumer  
*University of Minnesota*

Jane Maland Cady  
*University of Minnesota*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceslgen>

 Part of the [Service Learning Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Shumer, Robert D. and Cady, Jane Maland, "National Service: Expectation Versus Reality" (1997). *Service Learning, General*. Paper 59.  
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceslgen/59>

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Service Learning at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Service Learning, General by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).



NATIONAL SERVICE

EXPECTATION VERSUS REALITY

Presented at  
1997 Annual Meeting  
American Educational Research Association  
March 1997

Robert Shumer  
Jane Maland Cady  
University of Minnesota  
College of Education  
Department of Work, Community, and Family Education

NSLC  
c/o ETR Associates  
4 Carbonero Way  
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

Robert Shumer  
Jane Maland Cady  
University of Minnesota

## National Service

### Expectations Versus Reality

#### Introduction

National service has a long history in America. From the early colonies with their citizen soldiers, to religious organizations and social service, to modern day members of conservation corps and AmeriCorps, individuals have contributed important work for the benefit of their community and country. A more recent focus in the 20th century, initiated by William James' "Moral Equivalent of War" and carried out in the 1993 National Service Trust Act, has accelerated an interest in the concepts and practice of national service.

The last thirty years have seen a constant debate over national service -- how should it be constructed and what should be its goals? From the military draft in the 1960's the debate has centered on issues of mandatory, universal service versus voluntary, more localized programs. Issues about pay, organization, and participants have always been conjecture -- what might the program look like? However, the 1993 National Service Trust Act changed all that because the future, the imagined initiative, became real. With this reality came the opportunity to now study a living, vital organism called national service.

In 1994, The Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service authorized a multi-year study to determine how the program was operating, what impacts were being realized, and what cost-benefits were accruing to a unique national/state service program called Youth Works•AmeriCorps (so named because state legislation, called Youth Works, put \$3.8 million dollars in partnership with the federal effort to create a system for hundreds of individuals to provide service to their communities).

This report compares the historical goals, purposes, and designs for national service with the realities of what was found during two years of investigation. Using

some of the most comprehensive books written on the projected goals and program designs as background, we will compare what was expected with what actually happened. The purpose is to determine whether the imagined and conceptual notions of national service in any way predict what has unfolded.

### Historical Purposes

Many books and articles have been written about the history and purpose of national service. Four books provide a basic understanding of how and why service has been implemented in the country since colonial days and frame the basic concepts necessary to understand the issues surrounding the national service debate. *Youth and the Needs of the Nation* (The Potomac Institute, 1979), *National Service: What Would It Mean* (Danzig & Stanton, 1986), and *A Call to Civic Service* (Moskos, 1988), all present projections about what national programs would be like, and why. A fourth book, *A Call to Service* (Coles, 1993), presents the moral dimensions of service and why such orientations are important. Set against the framework of these scholarly works will be the findings of our two year study.

### *Youth and the Needs of the Nation*

*Youth and the Needs of the Nation* is a report from the Committee for the Study of National Service on the status of national service at that time. Funded by Ford and other foundations, this group set out to construct a rationale and actual guide for the development of national service. In the first part of the book the Committee addresses two significant issues: the conditions of youth and the needs of the nation. In the second part, Roger Landrum reviews the literature, discusses the issues involved in service, and makes recommendations as to how it should be shaped.

The purpose of service, according to this Committee, is to address the concerns of youth and society. To face these problems, they recommend specific proposals which

begin with a call for mandatory, national service at the post-secondary level to meet the “needs of the nation and the world community.” Additional recommendations follow which prescribe the nature of the program; these include: 1) creating a challenging, diverse program; 2) requiring a year of service which becomes as common as going to high school; 3) making a program universal for all ages and all regions; 4) meeting real economic, social and educational needs of the nation; 5) presenting all service options available (VISTA, Peace Corps, etc.); 6) helping organizations improve their services; 7) being seen not as job-training or work program for unemployed, but including career exploration and internships/apprenticeships; 8) including post-service incentives for educational and employment benefits; 9) encouraging participants to continue their education; 10) including military enlistment as a form of national service; 11) establishing service councils in local areas to assist in service-site selection; 12) establishing National Service system as a public corporation; and 13) connecting to volunteer services of older citizens. All of these goals and program elements are contained in an overall system that renders real service at a reasonable cost (estimated to be from \$5000-11,000 per member in 1979 dollars, [or \$17,463 in 1996 using a 5% average inflation factor]).

In the second part of the book, Roger Landrum presents several reasons for engaging in national service. He begins with reference to William James’ seminal essay, the “Moral Equivalent of War,” published in 1910. In this work, James argues for a peace time army of citizens to tackle problems of society to serve their nation and to gain a degree of toughness without callousness. He expects participants to grow in character, with the “childishness knocked out of them.”

A second perspective is from the point of view of human development. Based on James Coleman’s 1972 Panel on Youth Science Advisory Committee, the report emphasizes the fact that youth of that period were “action poor and information rich.” To counter this, they recommend participatory programs such as national service which focus on “interdependent, directed toward collectively-held goals.” The report cites several defects in current programs: few opportunities for service, shift to older service

participants, few options for youth under 18; most programs require two year commitment.

The third element was cost. The panel recommended cost-benefit or productivity analysis of work performed. The effect on participants should also be measured, especially related to improved social maturity, more varied experiences, and interdependent activities.

The report concludes with examples and models of national service, with appropriate goals and activities. They cite tutoring of low achieving students, improving day care for children, improving services for the elderly, and increasing service for the arts as typical activities performed by national service participants.

The report of the Committee on National Service suggests a program which mixes altruism with pragmatism, focusing on the broad goals and specific activities of community work. The challenge of the whole effort is mobilizing enough service-related jobs to engage the projected 100,000 to 1 million corps members.

*National Service: What Would It Mean?*

In Danzig and Szanton's *National Service: What Would It Mean*, (again sponsored by Ford Foundation), we find one of the best studies of national service options. Using detailed analytical skills, the authors explore four models of service. Each model, from school-based, to draft-based, to voluntary service, to universal service is assessed on five areas of effect: provision of public service; impact on the military; labor market consequences; participant impacts; and public costs or other public consequences. Part of their concern is about job displacement. No national service program would be viable if it is shown to replace existing workers. Their other concern is for stability -- that implementation would be constant, unaffected by current economic and social conditions which might necessitate its use, such as a great depression or massive economic disruption.

The authors argue that the primary purpose for national service is to fulfill unmet needs. There is difficulty in determining real unmet needs, though, because one must

show a failure of the marketplace and public resources to meet these needs. One problem in determining real need is that people in the fields designated have a tendency to “value their needs more highly than the public.” This means some people imagine needs because, they, themselves believe they exist; however, the general public may think that the problem is really rather small, and additional resources and human resources are not needed. In response to these concerns, Danzig and Szanton suggest that this is not really a big issue because needs are not static, and because national service may generate multiple benefits, including personal development and character building. The latter two outcomes are not dependent on social needs.

There is concern over the tasks to be performed. Studies show that human services provide the greatest area of need. Yet some of the work to be performed requires prior knowledge and experience, a concern for those involved in training for national service. Danzig and Szanton estimate the total number of individuals who could do national service varies from 3.5 to 4.0 million, with from 2.8 to 3.5 million individuals not requiring college training.

Clearly schools will be highly sought as service sites. Tutoring jobs are probably the most plentiful, with children the likely beneficiaries. Tutoring relationships usually help both parties, so evidence suggests this approach should produce academic and social benefits.

Health care is also prime area of service. Health care tasks would vary widely depending on the skill level and the understanding of the member. It might also bring institutions and organizations closer together.

Child care is another of the major service areas addressed. Corps member tasks might include working with pre-schools to accomplish their goals through direct service of monitoring play, leading games, and reading and telling stories. The authors contend that such National Service Participants (NSPs) would be partially prepared for such work because they come with experience in large families, baby-sitting, and athletics.

Additionally, conservation and the environment provide a potential set of positions for national service. In fact, this is the work most closely identified by the public with national service. Work with a variety of agencies could involve both

strenuous exercise and/or more clerical/office assignments. One value assigned to this area is the relatively high number of low-skilled jobs available. Minimal training is required for many positions. One drawback, though, is the seasonal nature of the work, since jobs such as tree planting only occur during certain months of the year. The authors estimate almost 165,000 positions could be found in this line of work.

Other social service positions are identified in the areas of criminal justice and public safety, libraries and museums, and locally produced miscellaneous work. Each area could provide many acceptable positions.

The aggregated total of jobs available to NSPs is close to 3.5 million. Education would account for 1.2 million, Health for 750,000, and Child care 820,000.

Danzig and Szanton discuss the personal needs of participants, differentiating between young adults and older persons. They cite work experience as an important need, yet realize that much of the direct experience is outside the traditional labor market. Therefore, they suggest that job training is not a realistic outcome for national service, but can contribute to generic skills of work preparation.

National service can also meet the needs of dropouts and high school graduates by providing meaningful work that includes pay and a chance for a job history. Service also provides an opportunity to learn how to work in social environments, an important skill for all to acquire.

National Service also provides a context for meeting the needs of others. As Margaret Mead argues, young people need to feel needed and to be placed in positions of responsibility where what they do matters. It also provides a context for cross cultural learning.

However, the authors make the case that there may be potential problems because needs and capacities may not match. They cite the fact that successful residential programs, such as the California Conservation Corps, retain only 28.8 percent of its 12 month enrollees. Even the Peace Corps retains only 70% of its enrollees, so the problem of matching people to meaningful, engaging work is a significant one.



The remainder of the book is devoted to discussing four projected models. The relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach is presented. The range of programs moves from mandatory to voluntary, with each having particular benefits and drawbacks.

Danzig and Szanton conclude by covering some critical issues in the national service debate. They suggest that most forms of service are constitutionally permissible and plausible. They also believe there is real work to be done -- that this does not have to be a make-work initiative. Most forms of national service would not accomplish public service tasks cheaply and such service would meet some needs of youth, but at relatively high costs. One strong conclusion is that national service is a poor solution to youth unemployment, and would not provide sufficient training and focus to meet the employability issues of good job training. Elders may actually be the group who would benefit more from national service. The military would not really be enhanced by national service -- the quality or number of recruits would not dramatically be affected. Opportunity costs are critical to the success of the venture, and they vary according to periods of high or low unemployment. Choices actually may lower the costs -- giving people options may increase retention and opportunity to feel needed and be successful. Ultimately, the less obvious benefits may be the most important -- creating a sense of participation on the part of NSPs may help sustain a feeling of nationalism and connection to country. It may also open up institutions closed to the public, providing greater access to additional resources and ideas. It may also create a larger pool of potential workers in many areas of social science, day care, conservation, and other social tasks. National service may simply increase the spirit and action of volunteerism, allowing much more to be done to deal with social problems.

In order to move to the next steps, Danzig and Szanton suggest we experiment with different options and models of service. There is still so much that is unknown about the complexity of such a system that it bears implementation and study before it is embraced universally. National service has great potential, but also has some serious potential flaws. Only time and thoughtful evaluation will help answer the critical

questions about whether national service would truly meet the needs of the nation and its citizens.

*A Call to Civic Service*

In Charles Moskos' *A Call to Civic Service* we have an extensive history of national service, coupled with many recommendations for a model program. Moskos' work is also one of the most thoughtful and comprehensive analyses of national service issues. He begins by describing national service:

not "as a magical talisman, a magical means for transforming socially indifferent Americans into paragons of civic virtue...but the performance of civic duties that allow individuals to have a sense of the civic whole -- a whole that is more important than any single person or category of persons.."

Moskos, 1988, p.2

In the performance of these duties the debate forms around who receives benefit from such a program, whether the goal is instrumental or civic. Instrumental defines a program where the benefits of service improve the life of the server. Civic tradition focuses on the value of the service performed. It is the participation in this civic life that Moskos refers to as civic content -- the essence of civilian service. The issue of compulsory versus voluntary is not a real concern for Moskos, because it does not influence what is actually done in the program. More important is the promotion of civic mindedness which describes the reshaping efforts of individuals. This is the essence of national service.

Moskos defends the inclusion of youth in the process because service is the formative tie that connects young people with their country. Youth make sense to work

with because they are ones who have the most flexibility in their lives and for whom the service experience will have the largest impact.

A central issue in the national service debate is the role of citizen rights versus citizen responsibilities. The first focuses on the individual's role in a democratic state; the latter describes a form of civic cohesion, where people have a responsibility to work together for the common good. A civic minded national service program "must ultimately rest on some kind of enlightened patriotism." National service, for Moskos, is designed to develop a form of patriotism where citizens approach their country with reverence, "tempered with balance and reflection." He calls for an experience that produces citizens who understand common issues and appreciate the effort necessary to deal with them.

He, too, refers to William James' article, "The Moral Equivalent of War" as one of the central legacies on service. As a military scholar, Moskos praises the military dimensions of the essay, yet acknowledges that James portrays citizen service as something superior to military contributions. Moskos' opinion is that both are part of a seamless web of service, each having benefits and drawbacks.

National service history begins with citizen soldiers and their role in American history. He traces the various historical conflicts, where citizen soldiers fought gallantly to preserve the American way of life. Throughout the last several centuries, citizens have served to protect the United States through voluntary association. In the 20th century there have been several examples of citizen service where individuals have worked in various capacities to protect freedom and to promote civic virtues. Citizens have been involved in the debate for decades, but never forged an agenda until ROTC and related programs connected the military with national service.

Conscientious objectors also have been involved in service for centuries. Attempting to create an alternative to military service, some individuals have offered domestic work in lieu of state sponsored national service. From colonial times to recent wars, arrangements have been made between citizens and their government to serve in non-combatant roles when faced with times of military conflict. The role of conscientious objectors has laid a foundation for non-military national service.

Discussing some of the movements for service in the early 20th century, Moskos focuses on the New Deal programs, contending that the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and National Youth Administration (NYA) programs were not about character building, but “providing jobs for desperate people who were out of work.” Most of the jobs were in conservation and road building, with great care taken to “avoid projects that might compete with private enterprise or displace employed workers.”

The changes in the CCC brought about changes in the public’s understanding of national service. Not only was the actual work valued, but the impact on personal development was reported by members to be an equally important outcome of the experience. Some later changes in the CCC, by 1940, formed programs such as Camp William James, which operated with an “explicit ethos of national service.”

The development of the various service programs became institutionalized in the later part of the century through more formalized conscientious objections, the Peace Corps, VISTA, and state conservation corps. Each program was targeted at different populations, with the Peace Corps focusing on college graduates, VISTA engaging low income youth (allegedly with more politically motivated behavior), and the conservation corps focused on summer youth. The development of the Youth Conservation Corps in the 1970s became the first national program since the CCC, and demonstrated how a program marshalled through collaboration with federal and state entities, requiring cost sharing by the states could focus on more than just jobs programs. It was not just a poverty program, but a comprehensive one with membership not limited to low-income youth. The YCC had the highest retention rate of any program -- about 90%, due to the limited summer nature of the program and the attitudes of the members, who found the program worthwhile and one of the most satisfying experiences of their lives. Considered to be an effective program, the cost-benefit ratio was 1:0.94, or \$0.94 for every dollar expended.

According to Moskos, the citizen soldier had given way to the all volunteer service force by the 1980s. What sprang up in renewed fashion was state and local programs. From the California Conservaton Corps in the 1970s, to other corps in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, youth were engaged in full-time residential programs

working on conservation projects. While these programs were quite successful in accomplishing valuable work, their retention rates were quite low, with the California CC keeping only about one-third of its enrollees throughout the entire year. Local programs, such as in Marin County and New York City (City Volunteer Corps) began to work on urban issues, such as park clean-up and graffiti abatement. Seattle's Program for Local Service (PLS) established one of the first models to deliver social services, be funded by federal money but controlled by local agencies, and required local agencies to contribute monetary matches. A later program, the Washington Service Corps, was an entity of the state's employment department, and offered youth training opportunities as they performed community service. Participants received a stipend in this program, less than minimum wage, and were introduced to the notion of a post-service award in 1988.

Moskos continues the discussion of national service by focusing on programs that were about job training, not service. Youth unemployment was a driving purpose for these program, such as the Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA) in 1963; the follow-up youth component, the Neighborhood Youth Corp in 1965; the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) in 1973; and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in 1983. One of the better and long lasting programs, the Job Corps, has continued to receive support as a successful program, although it has no service agenda. The program has a 67% retention rate.

In one of the final chapters, Moskos presents the relationship between service and education. Citing the G.I. Bill and ROTC Scholarships, he states the precedent for using benefits from engagement in service for educational purposes. Other initiatives, from the National Defense Student Loan program, where recipients were allowed to cancel half their loan for teaching in specific disciplines related to math and science, to the Direct Student Loan program (renamed the Perkins Loans in 1987), where teaching in elementary or secondary schools in low-income areas allowed for cancellation of part of the indebtedness were highlighted as examples of connecting service with education. The Health Service Corps, the Teacher Corps, and even the New York Police Cadet Corps all represent models of connections between entering targeted service occupations and forgiveness of debt incurred through participation in higher education and training

programs. Even student aid without regard for service, such as with Guaranteed Student Loans in 1965, and Pell Grants in 1972, and Work Study were enacted to help lower - income students to finance their educations.

Moskos also discusses recent interest in school-based programs which make connections between service and learning. Citing the President's Science Advisory Panel in 1972, he describes the need to connect young people with communities for multiple purposes, one of which was to learn adult responsibility. Other reports, such as the National Commission on Youth, stressed the importance of incorporating community connected learning with traditional education, and called for "national service" as a means to "bridge the gap between youth and adulthood." School districts, such as Atlanta, require a seventy-five hour contribution of service for high school graduation. Colleges, too, have joined the movement, with Campus Compact, COOL, and other organizations promoting community service as an important component of college life.

Given this history, Moskos proposes a plan for national service. He suggests that any plan has to include features of the national mood. National service must perform tasks that "neither the marketplace nor government can provide." Such service must emphasize the ethic of citizenship duty rather than employment. Administration for such a program should be a public corporation similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and should not have control over the Peace Corps or VISTA. The majority of civilian workers would not be in federal programs. State and local units would set up their own corps, designating local organizations to operate the programs. Costs should be moderate -- enough to sustain members at minimal levels of subsistence. Costs should be studied to determine the value of work performed and impacts of the service. Educational benefits for participants is a "keystone" of national service programs. Recruitment of members must include a cross-section of Americans, engaging people of differing backgrounds, talents, and abilities in the overall composition of the national corps.

These recommendations are based on three centuries of knowledge and experience. They capture, for Moskos, the best of what we know about citizen service. They need to be tested, and modified, to ensure that the goals of national service,

whatever they might be, are fulfilled through the actions of the participants. Such success through flexibility, will mollify the critics (of whom there are many) and allow citizen service to become an integral part of the national landscape.

### *The Call of Service*

In *The Call of Service* psychiatrist Robert Coles takes a different perspective, questioning why people engage in service to others. The book covers the personal musings of Coles and how he came to know and do service, as well as the experiences of others whom he interviewed and admired. In this comprehensive account, Coles sets the stage for understanding how people try to be responsible for their world.

Coles begins his book with a tale about a six year old girl, Tessie, who was involved in integrating an elementary school in New Orleans. In great detail he follows her journey, and that of her grandmother, through a terrible year-long ordeal. Tessie assumes her role by going to school despite the angry mobs. She is not as a fighter; rather, she is a servant to others. Her grandmother describes her actions as a calling -- "we're the lucky ones to be called, and we've got to prove we can do what the Lord wants, that we're up to it"

Coles describes how this understanding forced him to abandon his more formal ways of investigating, by asking and observing, and to learn by doing service. He offers more stories of his involvement with civil rights efforts in other parts of the country, where he becomes an active participant in the service process. The book offers "stories and observations about those who render service...and about those who are served. I write as a witness trying to do justice through narration to lives I met."

Coles first describes various kinds of service based on motives. Some serve because of strongly held beliefs about social justice -- they want to affect social change. And social change is buffered by human interaction, the direct work with the people affected by social injustice. Others do community service, hoping to improve the lives of the individuals they serve. They hope to bring about change through example, often working through programs in schools and religious organizations. Still others serve

through personal gestures. Simple contacts, planned and unplanned with others in need, drives the service act. Charity provides motivation for some who believe in the moral mandate to help others. Religious motivation, the desire to care about others because of the need to be a good person, provides another reason to serve. Government sanctioned service, through programs such as VISTA and the Peace Corps, gives people a chance to serve through institutional structures connected to government -- that social organizations require political structures to seek equity and fairness. Perhaps the most important element of service is how "a particular person manages to connect with those others being in some way taught or advised or assisted." Human connection is perhaps the key to the various motivational factors engaging people in service.

He goes on to describe the "satisfactions" that accompany the service. Good feelings about service come from actually doing something that reaches another in some observable way. This satisfaction is couched in the moral purpose of the person providing service, with the moral purpose often being the benefit of the server in learning more about themselves. There is also a personal affirmation of the service done -- a sense that it helps the server to validate their beliefs and actions. Others serve because they believe in hard work -- in simply doing the work for the sake of work itself. There is little personal engagement or satisfaction -- just a sense of accomplishing something that needs doing. Finally, some serve because it helps their lives -- advancing a career, gaining some personal benefit.

Service is not risk free. Coles describes the various hazards to doing helpful work, such as weariness and resignation that somethings can't easily be changed; or cynicism, that the battle is not progressing, but getting worse; that arrogance, anger, and bitterness set in due to frustration with the lack of, or slow progress; that despair takes over because of failure to bring about change; and depression becomes overbearing because of loss of power, both personal and social, to make positive, observable change.

The way to learn service is to do it. Though there are many models and personal heros, the experience enhances the thoughts about service. While many authors write about experiences involved with service, the ability to connect the doing with the thinking makes the whole process come together.



Youthful idealism still has a role in doing service. Coles reflects on his own stories, about connecting the readings in his own courses with the philosophy and idealism represented by literary giants. He discusses the desire of young people to make the world a more perfect place. Yet, we discover there is an older idealism, one that Dorothy Day called “praying by doing.” Older idealists shift from belief to action, knowing that through action some movement will occur (in small steps). There is a shift in understanding from altering the whole world to simply changing a single action or place.

Service becomes an act of personal meaning. Through reflection on the actions and the consequences we are able to place personal value on the process. For those who heed the call to service, there is a possible longer lasting change. One’s personal life can be affected forever. Service can be transformational, setting into motion a whole set of new actions and beliefs. The call of service varies among us all -- and produces personal and social change that can be seen and felt far into the future.

#### Summary of Historical Goals, Purposes, and Designs

What have we learned about goals, purposes, and designs from the preceding four books? Certainly we know that national service has been a long-standing American phenomenon. Its roots are deep and varied and its purpose and philosophy complex.

We know there are many goals for national service. Feelings of altruism, stronger religious beliefs, moral commitment, desire to perform community service, desire for personal growth, feelings of charity, desire for social justice, sense of governmental obligations to serve citizens, personal duty, and personal benefit describe some of the motivating factors which drive people to serve. This “call to service” is learned from mentors, literature, family, heroes, role models, and best understood through doing. The act of service both confirms and affirms one’s sense of connection with other people.

Our experts report that national service can serve many purposes. It “drives the childishness” from our youth, it provides them with responsibility and purpose, it gives youth meaningful things to do, it provides opportunity to explore careers and to learn

about jobs, it helps youth transition to adulthood, it provides worthwhile alternatives to military work, it gives youth important contexts for learning, it helps to connect schooling with community, and it helps young people to understand the whole of citizenship by allowing them to participate in projects larger than themselves.

While there are some differences in recommended structures for national service, there are surprisingly many similarities between reports. National service should engage participants in work not performed by the market or regular government agencies; it should not displace workers; it should combine federal systems with locally controlled units; it should provide a living wage or stipend; such programs should provide educational awards or benefits; it should be composed of varied members from different racial, ethnic, and age groups; it should not be perceived or designed as a job-training program; it should be measured by productivity and other outcomes; it should be governed by a public corporation; it should include all options, such as with the Peace Corps and VISTA; it should be cost effective; and it should be based on the daily needs of communities, without regard for special problems or crises. National service has much to offer society, but also has some drawbacks.

Thus, in theory, we know a lot about what national service is supposed to be. We also assume we know why people want to participate. We also think we know what makes for successful programming. Given this conceptual knowledge, what do we know from the most recent attempts to implement national service across the country?

#### What We Know: The Minnesota Experience

Knowing what people think national service to be, what is it really like? Based on a two year study of the Youth Works•AmeriCorps program in Minnesota, from September 1994 to August 1996, we know a great deal about what national service looks like and what impact it has on members, organizations, and communities. The following information describes the results of that study.

## First and Second Year Reports: The Minnesota Experience

For two years a team of faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and others have gathered information about the Members of the Minnesota state and national service programs. How information was gathered and processed, and the results of that study, is reported next.

### Method

The method of inquiry was primarily qualitative in nature. A research team from the University of Minnesota composed of two faculty, five graduate assistants, and students from a two quarter/year qualitative research course (and undergraduates in a communication course in the first year) conducted observations, interviews, surveys, and focus groups on five of the seven Americorps•YouthWorks programs in Minnesota. Following the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) outlined by Spradley (1980), data collection procedures and analysis described by Patton, and data analysis processes described by Miles and Huberman (1984), the team of researchers performed their data collection and analysis in a group context. Meeting at regular intervals, these evaluators discussed common components, taxonomies, principles, and uniform themes. Directed by the two research leaders, a final report was produced, integrating the graduate team results with the individual reports generated for the research course.

Data was also collected from three selected programs in order to conduct a cost-benefits analysis. The areas of study were prescribed in a previous report (Corrie, et al, 1994) on potential cost-benefit savings for the Youth Works program. Analysis was done for the first year using specific information from programs and community agencies. Follow-up for the second year examined the same three elements, using data for both the second year and average data from both years.

The first year report, totaling almost 275 pages, describes the basic issues for the year and gives great detail about the impacts of the program on members, organizations, and communities. The second year report, of considerably less length, describes both the changes in the program structure and effectiveness and follow-up information data. The second year report includes many comparisons between first and second year practices.

### Evidence

Evidence for the study was compiled from interviews and observations of Corps members, staff, and community members. Almost 1000 pages of field notes were collected each year by the researchers, with analysis reported based on summations and syntheses of the data.

Results indicated that there were definable impacts noted for participants, organizations, and communities. Perhaps the greatest impact was not on any one area; rather the YouthWorks•AmeriCorps program served as a catalyst to collaboration and cooperation between individuals and community agencies. Corps members, in their capacity as organization members, were able to connect various community groups. Corps members reported several transformational experiences, while most reported some important contribution. There were several members in the first year who reported problems with the system, especially in meeting their expectations.

Several issues emerged in the first year and continued into the second. Confusion over job training versus service was a common area noted by members and community site directors. Communication issues were a problem, especially between project staff and site directors. Several community site directors were unclear as to what was expected of them and their direction of Corps members as they performed their service activities.

These communication problems persisted into the second year, although they were not as severe. Retention also emerged as a problematic issue, with some programs losing as many as half their members over the year.

Follow-up surveys of second year members indicated that the 145 who responded (57% return rate) found national service to be very rewarding. Surveys indicated that the impact of the national service program was more than about service -- it met many needs. The most frequently mentioned effect was on personal and life skills (39%), with meaningful service and personal satisfaction (33%) and career and vocational skills (32%) close behind. The other rated areas were interpersonal and communication skills (16%), working toward community change (16%), academic progress and basic skills (12%), educational awards (8%), profound, life changing experiences (8%), and negative experiences (1%). Clearly these responses indicated that the service experience helped to develop personal skills, accompanied by good service and feelings of personal satisfaction. Interestingly, profound, life changing experiences occurred less than 10% of the time, as did strong feelings about the financial incentives. This indicates that the strength of the personal benefits and feelings associated with the service far outweighed the economic benefits and the significant life changes.

Program data was collected to determine costs per participants in both years. In the first year, total costs were computed to be \$22,829. These figures assumed that all members would work full time and receive a full educational stipend. In the second year, the costs were determined to be \$17,074, almost \$6,000 less. This large variance was due to the computation of actual costs, using figures for members who were full time and part time. The reduction in available educational awards, coupled with the reduction in actual stipends, produced the reduced per member cost.

Program costs were also evaluated to determine whether the programs were cost effective. A cost-benefit analysis was done for three areas of study: educational enhancement, crime reduction for a neighborhood program, and community improvement for a construction program. Using added tax revenues provided by increased income resulting from completion of high school (diplomas and GEDs), ratios ranged from 123% to 165% in the first year, and 134% to 193% in the second. For crime reduction savings

based on data from crime reduction in police grids surrounding a particular program, ratios were 294% in Year I and ranged from 215% to 723% in Year II (due to expanded number of police grids analyzed in the second year). For the construction project, where the majority of savings came from reduction in incarceration costs and educational enhancement, ratios were 390% in the first year and 194% in the second. The two year average for the three areas evaluated returned a ratio of 234%. This means that the program returned \$2.34 for every \$1.00 expended.

Retention rates for all the programs in Minnesota varied quite a bit. Some individual programs during the first year operated by agencies focusing on job training retained only about 25% of their participants. Other programs with a higher percentage of college students ranged above 80%. The average for the first year was approximately 65%. The second year improved slightly, with retention for all the programs moving closer to 70%.

Results of the second year study indicate that there is definite value in the Youth Works•AmeriCorps program. The second year program made modifications based on the first year evaluation and on personal experience to make the program more responsive to Corps members and community needs. Communication systems were improved as programs instituted focus groups to better understand experiences of the Corps members themselves. Basic programs improved as Corps members felt more personal support from other members. State Commission staff provided more direction in the second year and more constructive monitoring of program activities. Issues of improved communication between programs and site sponsors persisted, although the intensity and quantity were reduced. To attend to these communication problems, several programs instituted written agreements between agencies to ensure clearer expectations and understandings. Overall, the second year evaluation suggested that the experience of the first year made a huge difference -- everyone had a better understanding of what to expect and how to deal with issues. Even the early tension between the national corporation and the local programs improved as program directors felt more influential during the second year.

One important finding during the second year was that some corps members served in unique capacities in communities -- they connected organizations together. Because they were neither employees nor volunteers, corps members were able to speak out on issues not usually mentioned by paid employees, and able to make changes more effectively than volunteers because they were more strongly attached to the organizational system. Thus, AmeriCorps members became the “glue” to create social capital in communities, helping to effectively network organizations and people.

Another finding was that many members who were considered in risk categories actually had strengths in specific settings. This meant that the notion of “risk” was normative; it had a contextual meaning. An individual who might speak English as a second language, and might be less prepared to read and write in formal settings, could be considered to be talented when placed in a community settings where his/her language skills were helpful in allowing local people to speak and understand.

Other factors, such as maturity and stability influenced how community agencies worked with corps members. There was a constant tension between what was considered work and what was service; it posed problems for community sponsors because they did not always know how much latitude to give to members, especially those who had limited work experience and sometimes violated normal rules of employment.

For members who reported transformative experiences or being strongly influenced by their service, the notions of meaningfulness and human connection were routinely cited as important elements of the corps experience. Members felt moved by their service when they were able to feel that their efforts made a difference in the lives of individuals in the community.

### Comparing Past Projects with Actual Findings

Since many people made projections about what national service might be like, and now that we have actual data on what really happened in Minnesota (and other parts of the country), on how good the predictions were, and what was learned that was not expected. First, the projections were actually quite accurate. Most of the program

elements that were envisioned by the Potomac Group, Danzig and Szanton, and Moskos are actually part of the national service system. There is a public corporation, the Corporation for National Service, that operates the system. The organization is based on a balance between federal direction and local control, just as Moskos had recommended. Corps members provide a variety of services in settings that represent multicultural mixtures of people and backgrounds. The stipend paid allows for minimal subsistence, and there is an educational incentive of \$4725 for successful completion of 1700 hours of service. Local community agencies predominate, at least in Minnesota, in organizing and delivering service.

Coles descriptions of meaningful service, learned by doing, echoes what Youth Works•AmeriCorps members revealed to be important in their community experiences. Many different kinds of satisfactions were felt by members; and the best feelings came when members could see changes in the people for whom they worked. Corps members were motivated by many reasons, most paralleling the ones spelled out in *A Call to Service*.

There was confusion over the roles of service and job training, especially since the Minnesota program had two laws, Youth Works and AmeriCorps, which have very different foci. Youth Works was born out of a connection between service and job training, with expectations for success in both areas, in addition to reducing juvenile crime and building the character of those serving. The Minnesota Department of Economic Security, the state job training entity, provided one of the larger programs, serving almost a quarter of the participants. AmeriCorps was focused much more on service and doing beneficial things for communities; it was more altruistic than its Youth Works counterpart.

Program cost-benefits of \$2.34 for the two years can be compared with historical precedents and with other studies done on the AmeriCorps program. Moskos (1988) indicated that the YCC in the 1970s returned 94 cents for every dollar expended, claiming this was a good rate of return for a public project. Cost-benefit analysis of three AmeriCorps programs showed ratios between 168% to 258% (Neumann, et al, 1995).



Therefore, the \$2.34 return for every \$1.00 expended was more than twice that of the successful YCC program and well within the range of other AmeriCorps programs nationwide.

Participant costs of \$22,824 for the first year and \$17,074 for the second were higher, as an average (\$19,950), than those predicted by the Potomac Institute projections in 1979. Using their range of \$5000 to \$11000 per member (the average being \$8,000) the 1996 cost was determined to be \$17,463, when adjusted for a 5% inflation rate. So while the average for the two years was higher than expected, the cost per member for the second year was actually fairly close to the projected costs. If the trend for the two years continues, than we can expect that the actual cost per member in Minnesota is very close to expectations predicted 17 years before.

Retention of members in national service has always been a major concern of policy makers. The retention rate of members in the two years in Minnesota has averaged close to 67%, or roughly 2/3 of all enrollees. Historically successful service programs, such as the California Conservation Corps, retained only about 1/3 of its members for the full year (Moskos, 1988). The most highly acclaimed job training program in the past several decades, the Job Corps, has a retention rate of about 67%, or 2/3 of all its members. The most successful program historically, the YCC, retained almost 90% of its members, although it was operated only as a summer program (Moskos, 1988). Therefore, the retention rate for Minnesota corps members, while seemingly below expectations during the first two years, is actually well within the range of good programs from the past. If the change between the first and second year continues to increase for the next several years, Youth Works•AmeriCorps could be one of the most successful programs, with regards to participant retention, in history.

### The Unexpected

A few findings from the evaluation were made that were not expected. First, the networking roles some corps members filled were not clearly predicted in earlier models.

Few people realized how corps members would serve in unique capacities, creating the linkages that would literally move communities closer together and enhance community collaboration. Corps members served as linking individuals, sometimes connecting two agencies through the Corps member's efforts and personal acquaintances. Research on longer term collaborations (Skolnik, 1997) revealed that imbedded relationships, ones developed over a period of years through common efforts in the community, helped strengthen the connections between people and organizations. Thus Youth Works•AmeriCorps programs served as a catalyst in communities to bring people and organizations together: they allowed community leaders and corps members other opportunities to work together to promote and sustain service programs. National service initiatives required community members to join in new ways to meet more comprehensive needs.

A second finding, from the follow-up survey with first year members, revealed that the impact of service on members was a bit different than expected. While service clearly was important, other outcomes stressed personal development, career opportunities, and communication skills. What was surprising about this survey was the revelation that only 8% of the respondents cited the educational awards as a major outcome. This does not necessarily mean that corps members did not want the money; rather it indicated that money was not as strong a motivator to complete the program as personal development and worthwhile service. Members felt that doing service, connecting with community members in meaningful ways, had a more powerful affect than the thought of using the award for educational purposes.

Another subtle finding was that the notion of "risk" was not fixed; rather it was dependent on setting and circumstance. Participants who were bilingual, for example, had more difficult times performing in certain tutorial activities where the lack of background and experience with English made their jobs harder and their success levels more difficult. Yet, these same individuals were exceptional when operating in community placements where their ability in a second language was needed to promote good communication and understanding with non-native speakers. This meant that

members who typically might not be as well prepared for national service work were able to function exceptional well in these particular settings.

### Conclusion

This comparison of historical roots with real program evaluation reveals an important perspective on current national service efforts. It suggests that much of the earlier projections about the goals, purposes, and designs of national service were fairly on target. The reasons for doing national service and the expectations of society, organizations, and people living the experiences were tempered by the realities of actually doing the programs. The basic structures, combining a public corporation with state commissions and with local, community organizations to implement the effort was accurately predicted as a viable system. While there were some problems anticipated in a system that had a centralized body in Washington directing more local initiatives, there was good progress between the first and second year in working out problem areas. The entire system itself was more comfortable and more understanding in the second year.

As discussed in the first year report, and reinforced as programs improved in the second year, communication issues were at the heart of the initiative. Communication between the Corporation for National Service and the state entities, between the state and project directors, between project directors and corps members, and between corps members and community recipients: all these communication systems needed clarity and constant attention. What happened between the first and second year was a concerted effort to put more information in writing, to develop more written contracts between corps and community agencies, and to do more evaluative activities (such as focus groups) to get people to talk to one another about how things were going and how they could be improved.

The eventual process came down to one of connecting expectations of each person and organization with the realities of the effort. It seemed like everyone had a different expectation, for the program, for themselves, and for others. The heart of the program was working through these expectations by connecting the expectations with realities --

by processing what was with what was hoped for. In the end, expectations and realities came closer together. This occurred as individuals and organizations were able to participate more in decisions, in planning, and in evaluating implementation and outcomes.

There is still a way to go to make the Youth Works•AmeriCorps program in Minnesota more effective. However, results of the first two years of the initiative, demonstrating a cost-effective, constantly improving system, suggest that national service provides important opportunities to improve communities and motivate citizens. Future evaluations will tell just how successful we are in promoting and developing a viable national program.

## REFERENCES

- Coles, R. (1993). *The call of service*. Boston, MA.: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Corrie, B., Dawkins, A., & Kielsmeier, J.(1994). "The economics of the forgotten half: a cost-benefit analysis of the Minnesota youth works proposal." St. Paul, MN.: House of Representatives (House File 2).
- Danzig, R. & Szanton, P. (1986). *National service: what would it mean?* Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books.
- The Potomac Institute (1979). *Youth and the needs of a nation: report of the committee for the study of national service*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, A.(1984). *Qualitative data analysis: a sourcebook of new methods*. Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage.
- Moskos, C. (1988). *A call to civic service: national service for country and community*. New York, NY.: The Free Press.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods: second edition*. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage Publications.
- Shumer, R. & Maland Cady, J., et al (1996). *Youth Works•AmeriCorp evaluation: first year report, 1994-95* Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Minnesota,. Center for Experiential Education and Service Learning.
- Shumer, R. & Maland Cady, J., et al (1997). *Youth Works•AmeriCorp evaluation: second year report, 1995-96*. Department of Work, Community, and Family Education, University of Minnesota,. Center for Experiential Education and Service Learning.
- Skolnik, R. (1997). *Social relations, trust and effectiveness in interorganizational relations*. In Shumer, R. & Maland Cady, J., et al (1997). *Youth Works•AmeriCorp evaluation: second year report, 1995-96*. Department of Work, Community, and Family Education, University of Minnesota,. Center for Experiential Education and Service Learning.

Spradley, J. (1980). *Participant observation*. Fort Worth, TX.: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich College Publishers.