

8-1-1968

National Needs and National Service

Donald J. Eberly

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

Recommended Citation

Eberly, Donald J., "National Needs and National Service" (1968). *Service Learning, General*. 287.
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slceslgen/287>

This Article 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.



AN 00 513

CURRENT History

AUGUST, 1968

VOL. 55, NO. 324

Moving toward the 1970's, how can the United States best meet its needs for defense and social welfare? In the last of our three issues on these questions, seven articles evaluate the nation's needs and the choices it faces. Setting these problems in perspective, our introductory author advocates "A properly organized and administered program of national service. . . ."

National Needs and National Service

National Information Center
for Service Learning
1954 Buford Ave, Room R290
St. Paul, MN 55108-6197

BY DONALD J. EBERLY

Executive Director, National Service Secretariat

ONLY A FEW DECADES ago the average American spent most of his time producing or earning money to buy his basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. With the law of supply and demand operating to fill these needs, the economic system was in balance.

In the second half of the Twentieth Century, with increases in productivity and the large-scale introduction of automation, a far smaller share of the national effort is required to meet the basic needs of survival. Americans have established within the borders of the United States a society in which life—the first of the unalienable rights set forth in the Declaration of Independence—is fairly well assured. What Americans seek now are Liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all. Operationally, these goals translate into such elements as education, good health, clean air and water, personal safety, meaningful occupations and enjoyable leisure-time activities.

Yet somehow the "law" of supply and demand for social services is not being obeyed.

Millions of five- and six-year-old children are going to school eager to learn and to become personally involved with someone they can respect, but before long many of them come to feel regarded more as numbers than persons. Because of the inadequacy of medical care available in the cities' ghettos and in rural areas, the United States has fallen to seventeenth place in infant mortality rates. Clearly, millions of willing hands and hearts and minds are needed and millions could become available. Society's demand and supply equation *could be* balanced, if some national service program were developed to enlist the nation's youth.

Such a program of national service has been defined as giving an opportunity to "each young person to serve his country in a manner consistent with the needs of the nation—recognizing national defense as the first priority—and consistent with the education and interests of those participating, without infringing on the personal or economic welfare of others but contributing to the liberty and well-being of all."¹ As such, the concept of national service would embrace both military and nonmilitary service—although some advocates would administer nonmilitary ac-

¹ Donald J. Eberly (ed.), *A Profile of National Service* (Washington, D.C.: National Service Secretariat, 1966), p. 3.

tivities separately from the military while others would link them in various ways. Some advocates urge compulsory national service for all; some support compulsory service for all young men; some believe that a national service program should be voluntary.

Much has been written about the qualitative aspects of a national service program: its value as an instrument to accomplish needed tasks in such fields as health, education and conservation; its value as experiential education for national service participants; its contribution to the social awareness, choice of career decisions and perspectives on life for each person who serves; and its potential for fulfilling the individual's sense of responsibility to serve his country and his fellow man. (These aspects will be discussed in the articles that follow.)

Less attention has been paid to the quantitative aspects of national service. How many real jobs can be identified? There would be little residual value in a national service program that consisted largely of make-work assignments. Given a sufficient demand for young people to serve, how many would be participating at any one time in a program of compulsory service? Of voluntary service? How should we go about organizing national service? And finally, how much would it cost?

In order to set the dimensions of national service into context, we shall first examine the pertinent facts about major federally funded service-learning programs.

There is not enough room to describe all the programs that might be expected to receive national service participants. (See Table II.) Among the federal programs omitted from Table II are the Manpower Development Training Program, the Teacher Corps, the Head Start program, and Upward Bound. Even more important to consideration of national service are the hundreds of thousands of voluntary agencies, churches, schools, hospitals, libraries, conservation units and municipal governments that could receive and use national service participants.

When the Peace Corps was proposed in 1960 by Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and

John F. Kennedy, both recommended it as a three-year program that would classify its participants as fulfilling peacetime military obligations. The Peace Corps now operates in 57 nations and offers excellent opportunities for service, informal learning and cross-cultural experiences. There is no statutory military deferment or exemption for Peace Corps volunteers. In practice, a few of the nation's 4,000 draft boards conscript volunteers while in overseas Peace Corps service; most boards defer volunteers in service; and some of them never draft returned Peace Corps men.

The Job Corps stresses formal learning. Cross-cultural experiences are few, since enrollment is limited to the financially and educationally poor. The Job Corps Conservation Centers have a formal service dimension and have performed some \$32,000,000 worth of conservation work since the Corps began. Participants at all centers also give volunteer service to neighboring communities.

Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), often called the domestic Peace Corps, stresses service, cross-cultural living and informal learning in reference to formal education. VISTA had its origin in a study initiated in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy, "Information on a Proposed National Service Program."

The Neighborhood Youth Corps is primarily a work-experience program. It has a small element of formal education and little opportunity for cross-cultural enrichment because its participants live at home.

The College Work-Study Program is designed to help needy students attend college. By definition, then, it has a strong element of formal education and offers opportunity for—though no guarantee of—cross-cultural experiences. From the national service viewpoint, its major drawback is that it gives no encouragement to service activities like tutoring slum children in preference to jobs like washing dishes in the college cafeteria.

Before getting into statistics on new program possibilities, a distinction must be drawn between job openings and national needs. An ordinary survey of schools, hospitals and

social service agencies would reveal few actual openings that could be filled by young people in a program of national service. Such agencies have fallen into the habit of understating their real needs because decades of experience have taught them that the persons who allocate budgets allow only for the most critical requirements. Thus, school administrators ask for enough funds to supply one teacher for every 25 to 30 pupils although it is generally recognized that in many teaching situations a ratio of one teacher for every 10 to 15 pupils might be far more effective.

In order to measure real needs, a new approach to jobs and needs was followed by a presidential commission in 1965 and its survey revealed a need for an additional 5,300,000 persons in socially-useful jobs which could be filled by persons with a minimum of preentry skill and training. The commission estimated a new job potential of 1,100,000 in education, 1,200,000 in health, 1,300,000 in beautification, 700,000 in welfare and home care, 350,000 in public protection and 650,000 in urban renewal and sanitation.²

In making this kind of survey, it is critically important to pay close attention to job definitions. As a rule, a teacher's job has been regarded as so complex and demanding as to require a master's degree. Yet, when a teacher's daily routine is examined, it is clear that while a few activities require a master's degree, other tasks can be performed very well by a person with a junior college background; some tasks can be performed as well by a high school graduate, and a few can be performed even by a high school student.

In fact, sometimes several lesser qualified persons can handle a task more effectively than the teacher. Much of a teacher's time is directed to the learning needs of one individual at a time in a class of some 30 stu-

dents. The time of the remaining 29 students is often wasted. If there were more teacher's aides or tutors to work occasionally with groups of three or four and sometimes with only one, the teaching process would be more efficient and children would get a better education.

Comparable analyses can be made in such fields as health, conservation, and urban renewal.

The President's commission survey showing that 5 million additional persons are needed to undertake socially-useful work is misleading if one is seeking the number of positions that could be filled tomorrow or the day after. The survey assumes that every school superintendent, every principal and most teachers would welcome teacher's aides, would establish the conditions under which they would serve, and would provide for such matters as training, supervision, office space and housing. The same holds true for hospital directors, conservation officials, local government leaders, and so on. Hence, the survey is a useful indicator of the socially-desirable and useful jobs that could be available, with planning, in five to ten years. How many such jobs are available now? What are the nation's available human resources for a program of national service?

In late 1966, two surveys were made to estimate the number of participants in a national service program that could be placed within a few months. With the help of the District of Columbia Health and Welfare Council, the National Service Secretariat found openings for some 1300 national service participants in the Washington, D.C., area.³ The National League of Cities surveyed Atlanta, Dayton, Detroit, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix and Tacoma and identified openings for some 12,000 participants.⁴ Making allowance for only partial returns in both surveys, each survey found that for every 1,000 people, one national service participant could be placed in a useful service activity within a few months. Applied nation-wide, the two surveys suggest an immediate potential of 200,000 positions.

² Report of the National Commission on Technology, Automation and Economic Progress, *Technology and the American Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February, 1966), Volume I, p. 36.

³ Donald J. Eberly (ed.), *National Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), Appendix A.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Appendix B.

WHAT ARE THE HUMAN RESOURCES?

The number of American citizens presently 18 years of age is about 3,500,000, equally divided between male and female. Barring major catastrophes, that number will increase gradually until 1976, when it will begin to level off for the next several years at about 4,300,000. In 1966, the Defense Department reported that the percentage of men age 26 needed for service would decrease gradually due to the expanding population base, and would fall from 46 per cent in 1966 to 42 per cent in 1974, assuming a troop strength of 3,000,000.⁵ The number of women in the armed forces is presently 1 per cent of the total and, in spite of planned increases in some branches, is not expected to exceed 2 per cent in the foreseeable future.

Accepting these figures and projections, approximately 750,000 of today's 18-year-old men (1976's 26-year-olds) will be needed by the armed forces. They would still be eligible to undertake nonmilitary service thereafter, but probably few would do so if they had already given a period of service to their country. Generous discharge benefits and

definitely formulated plans for marriage, career and higher education would also dissuade many veterans from joining a national service program.

That leaves us with 1,000,000 18-year-old men and 1,750,000 18-year-old women. (As indicated earlier, about 10 per cent of each total group would be expected to fail physical or mental tests.) It is hard to know how to treat the statistic that 26 per cent of women aged 18-19 are married, widowed, divorced or separated, since the prospect of a period of national service could have the effect of delaying marriage for young women who wanted to get involved with the outside world before starting to raise a family. On the other hand, married women could enter national service if they served with their husbands and had no children. For the moment let us assume that, for reasons of marriage and childbirth, 26 per cent of the women would not enter national service.

There are two more major factors affecting the entry of women into a national service program. As they would presumably not be subject to the draft, they would not have to choose between the forms of service. On the other hand, surveys suggest that women are more inclined toward the kinds of activities included in national service. A 1966 Gallup survey asked how many college students had an interest in working in the VISTA program. Seventy-one per cent of the women said "yes" compared to 41 per cent of the men.⁶ If 71 per cent of the eligible women volunteered for national service, that would be 800,000, just over half the total of 1,750,000. Similarly, 41 per cent of all 18-year old men would total about 700,000.

It follows from the above figures that a large-scale voluntary national service program, after the initial build-up period, could be expected to attract up to 1,500,000 persons in the 18-year-old group, or 43 per cent of the youthful population. If they served for two years, the total participation at any one time could be about 3,000,000. By 1976, the participation level might rise to about 3,700,000.⁷

⁵ Statement of Thomas D. Morris, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower) before the House Committee on Armed Services. *Report on Department of Defense Study of the Draft*, June 30, 1966, p. 5. (Also p. 9926 of House Committee on Armed Services documents for 89th Congress.)

⁶ The Gallup Organization, Inc., *Attitudes of College Students Toward VISTA* (Princeton: Gallup, 1967), p. 9.

⁷ In comparison with the plans for a voluntary program, a compulsory service program for all youth, exempting only that 10 per cent physically or mentally unqualified, would have an appropriate current enrollment of 18-year olds as follows:

	Male	Female
Military service	750,000	15,000
Nonmilitary service	825,000	1,560,000
Total	1,575,000	1,575,000

Thus, the number of persons in nonmilitary service under a compulsory program would total some 2,385,000. Assuming a two-year enlistment, the total participation in nonmilitary service would then approximate 5 million as compared with about 3 million under a large-scale program of voluntary national service. Hence, the number of persons available to tackle civilian service activities is of the same order of magnitude as the needs of society. For further discussion of compulsory service see articles by Margaret Mead and Edward Hall in this issue.

A NATIONAL SERVICE MODEL

A voluntary national service program could be subsidized by a National Service Foundation that would underwrite subsistence allowances for up to three years for young people serving in approved activities. These activities would be primarily in the fields of education, health and conservation and would be approved by an advisory board composed of public officials and private citizens. Among the activities that would be approved by the board are work within certain federal programs, such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, and Job Corps Conservation Centers, and state programs like the Commonwealth Service Corps in Massachusetts.

Municipal service in local schools, libraries, hospitals or the departments of sanitation and public health, and work with voluntary non-profit organizations such as the Red Cross, Girl Scouts and YMCA would all qualify as national service activities. Church-sponsored projects would receive approval so long as participants served their fellow man without proselytizing him.

In this model, national service participants would be between the ages of 18 and 24, inclusive. The main entry standard would be willingness to serve. Minimum mental and health standards would have to be met, but they would be lower than those of the Armed Forces, which reject three out of every 10 young men. The rejection rate in this type of voluntary national service program would be one in 10.

Under this plan, entry into national service would not be forced; it would be accomplished by means of a contract between the young person and the foundation. The participant would agree to serve for a minimum of one year. He might, if he wished, sign up only on condition that he work in a certain field, such as tutoring or mental health. But if he insisted on specifying the place where he would serve and the agency that would supervise him, it is less likely that the foundation would accept him.

For its part, the foundation would be responsible for informing the participant about types of openings, training and testing him

and finally assigning him to an appropriate service activity. The foundation would provide needed transportation, clothing, medical care and a subsistence allowance. The agency to whom the participant would report would be responsible for proper housing, on-the-job training and supervision, while the foundation would make periodic checks to ensure that both the agency and the participant were living up to their contractual responsibilities.

For each year of completed service, the participant would become entitled to two years of further education. For example, a high school graduate who went into national service for three years would be entitled to six years of college or university education. No one receiving support from the foundation would be exempt from military service.

HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST?

The National Service Secretariat has estimated the annual expenditures for each national service participant at \$4,000. (See Table I). The purpose of the allowance is to make it financially possible for all young people to participate in national service. Thus, in setting allowances, the foundation would take into account the cost of living locally—including whether housing and food were being provided by local hospitality—and the recommendations of the sponsoring agency.

In order to encourage local initiative and minimize federal control, foundation support would be limited to underwriting. Some agencies would assume full fiscal responsibility for the national service participant and would utilize the foundation resources only to find participants and to provide basic training.

Others would share financial responsibility with the foundation. Agencies that were too poor to pay allowances would be asked to provide housing or some other assistance as an earnest of their participation in national service.

Like the GI Bill of Rights, national service in the long run should be viewed more as an investment than an expense. Because of

participation in national service, some young people would be off the relief rolls or out of jail, not only during their participation in national service but, because of their experiences, for a full lifetime. Others would become inspired to continue their formal education and become more productive members of the economy. These gains would be measurable in terms of dollars and cents and would supplement the intangible rewards of making more interesting career choices and of helping someone in need.

A CRASH PROGRAM OR A FIRM FOUNDATION?

The earlier a national service program were instituted, the easier it would be to build it gradually on a firm foundation, avoiding the pitfalls of a crash program. Of course, a crash program could be instituted, like President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, established in 1933. Roosevelt was inaugurated on March 4 of that year, the C.C.C. Bill became law on March 31 and three months later there were 274,375 young men enrolled in C.C.C. camps.⁸ Although the C.C.C. was one of the most popular New Deal programs, it suffered from lack of diversity and never developed a strong educational dimension.

In 1966, the National Service Secretariat recommended to the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service that national service take effect in 1967 and build up to an enrollment of half a million by 1970, in these steps:⁹

1968	50,000
1969	160,000
1970	500,000

Regardless of the year it started this three-year period would be a time of growth and experimentation. Schools, health units, conservation agencies, municipal governments and voluntary agencies could be expected to

⁸ John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967), pp. 23 and 45.

⁹ Donald J. Eberly (ed.), *National Service*, Appendix A.

¹⁰ See Terrence Collinan's article on pp. 97ff. of this issue.

sponsor the great majority of service activities. There would be room, however, for individual projects, where the project formulator and sponsoring agency would be none other than the national service participant. Various types of links would be established with national service programs in Chile, Iran, Israel, the Philippines, Tanzania, and other countries.¹⁰

While the operation and effectiveness of national service would be under continual review, the end of the third year would be an appropriate time for a major reappraisal. By then, the first participants would have completed their service period and there would be data on the number and kinds of young people volunteering for service, the kind and amount of service that is really needed and can be accomplished by young people, the kinds of decisions made by participants on career choices and higher education, and the effect of the program on race relations.

At a yearly cost for 500,000 participants of \$2 billion, or about one per cent of the annual federal budget, it would then be possible to cut back on the program, to keep it at its existing level or to continue to increase it without major strains on the economy or the social system.

TABLE I

National Foundation for Volunteer Service Estimated Unit Costs Per Annum

<i>Average cost of volunteer assigned to approved project</i>	
Subsistence allowance (\$3/day rural; \$8/day urban; average \$6/day)	\$2,190
End of tour adjustment allowance (\$75/month for 12 months)	900
Medical expenses and insurance	170
Transportation	180
Special clothing (range: \$0-\$100; average \$50)	50
Administration (not including administrative costs of sponsoring agency) 15 per cent of total volunteer costs	510
TOTAL	\$4,000

If a large-scale national service program goes into effect, its organization must be such as to ensure its integrity as truly representing the national service concept. A highly centralized operation is needed to run an

TABLE II
Comparison of National Service Program after Three Years with Selected Present
Federal Service—Learning Programs

	Peace Corps	Job Corps	VISTA	Neighborhood Youth Corps	College Work-Study Programs	Combined Totals	National Service (1971)
Budget (fiscal '68) In millions	\$107.5	\$285	\$30	\$269.5	\$134	\$826	\$2,000
Beginning Year	1961	1964	1964	1964	1965	—	1968
# Participants ('68 est.)	13,920	35,225	5,000	362,000	300,000	716,145	500,000
Full-time; projected*	13,000	37,000	10,000	120,000	70,000	250,000	500,000
Proportion fem.	35%	27%	51%	50%	58%	48%	53%
Age range	18 up	16-21	18 up	14 up	no limits	—	18-24
Age range majority	20-30	16-21	18-24	14-21	18-24	—	18-24
Education							
some coll.	96%	—	78%	—	100%	—	40%
H.S. grads	4%	1%	19%	—	—	—	30%
H.S. incomp.	—	99%	3%	100%	—	—	30%
Intensity	full time	full time	full time**	part time	part time	—	full time
Duration	2 yrs	6½ mo.	1-3 yrs	no limit	no limit	—	1-3 yrs

* Estimates were made by the author to provide a basis of comparison between current programs and a national service program.

** In addition to 5,000 full-time volunteers serving for at least one year, the VISTA budget provides for 1,500 Summer Associates serving full time for 10 weeks and some 40,000 members of the VISTA Citizens Corps serving without remuneration.

army or internal revenue service but would tend to erode the purpose and spirit of national service. Such an organization, for example, could too easily become a tool of government propaganda. In some respects the situation parallels that of public television and calls for a public funding agency relatively independent of the federal government.

The main drawback to a decentralized administration for national service is that it would take time and patience to establish.

Just as vital to the national service concept as decentralization is its independence of the Selective Service System. For if a national service program were dependent for its existence on the military draft and if in time there were no longer a need for the

¹¹ The Defense Department estimated in 1966 (Statement of Thomas Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 14) that the draft would not be needed if no more than two million persons were needed in the armed forces, assuming a 4 per cent unemployment rate.

draft,¹¹ it would mean the end of national service; or an unneeded conscription.

A properly organized and administered program of national service would help to balance the equation between society's needs and resources; it would help to reshape American education into something more relevant to the future; it would be a realistic example of how to turn swords into plowshares. And, if Albert Schweitzer's observation that "the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve" is true, national service could become the essence of our third national goal, the pursuit of happiness.

Donald J. Eberly has been a teacher and educational administrator in Nigeria, Turkey and the United States and is the editor of *National Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968).