

SERVE WASHINGTON

# STATE SERVICE PLAN

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2020-2022



## Serve Washington

Changing Communities. Changing Lives.



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Serve Washington staff 2019, from left to right: Alex Gonzalez, Robyn Harris, Katharine Swilley, Amber Martin-Jahn, Jenny Benson, Paula Towne, Mary Van Verst, Lou Thompson, Denise Berns.



## OUR MISSION

Serve Washington advances national service, volunteerism and civic engagement to improve lives, expands opportunities to meet the local critical needs of residents of Washington and strengthens community capacity while creating healthy and resilient communities.

## OUR VISION

National service, volunteerism and civic engagement are the foundation for caring communities and a thriving Washington.

## OUR WORK

Serve Washington's work is guided by the leadership of commissioners appointed by the governor who use their skills and expertise to meet Serve Washington's responsibilities defined in [Executive Order 16-08](#):

- Comply with federal requirements pertaining to State Commissions on National and Community Service, outlined at 42 U.S.C. § 12638.
- Seek additional sources of non-federal funds, especially private funds, to meet matching requirements and build upon existing service initiatives.
- Provide recommendations to the governor pertaining to legislative or policy initiatives that promote the ethic of service.
- Identify existing and new policies or practices that lead to the expansion of national service opportunities in Washington and support federal programs and efforts that expand national service.
- Provide the leadership and vision, alongside local volunteer organizations, civic and community groups, and units of government, to make service a part of the lives of all Washingtonians.





## OUR VALUES

We believe that national service and volunteerism have the potential to break down social barriers and contribute to alleviating generational poverty when principles of diversity, equity and inclusion are embraced. We strive to provide all Washingtonians an opportunity to contribute their full measure of talent and perspective through service, and work to support national service programs and volunteer leaders to create and support a service network that practices cultural awareness and humility.

To meet this value, national and volunteer programs must include the full participation, inclusion, engagement and empowerment of individuals from different races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, national origins, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, ideologies and other attributes that make us human. We strive to build a service culture where inclusiveness is a reflex, not an initiative, and the lived experiences that make us human are honored.





## STATE SERVICE PLAN BACKGROUND

Washington has a long history of community and national service that predates the AmeriCorps and state service commissions such as Serve Washington. The Washington Conservation Corps — modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s and 1940s, and the Washington Service Corps — to promote community service and support youth employment — were early and successful examples. Today, both operate as AmeriCorps programs, receiving federal funds that are matched, albeit at different levels, with state and local resources.

Washington also invests in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs, recognizing the value of tapping into the skills and energies of individuals older than 55.

The benefits of operating these programs are clear on several levels: National research shows that both [national service and community volunteerism are associated with higher odds for employment for individuals who are out of work](#). Longitudinal studies completed by the Corporation for National and Community Services on Senior [Corps members and the health benefits of service](#) have shown that Senior Corps volunteers, including those in RSVP, are healthier, less depressed and more connected to their community compared to individuals who do not volunteer regularly.

A strong history does not automatically equate to a strong future. Without sustained leadership and investment in service strategies, these legacies are at risk. The State Service Plan, a three-year, comprehensive national and community service blueprint, sets state priorities while aligning with the most recent [Corporation for National and Community Service Strategic Plan](#) and the [2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act](#).

The plan also serves as a mechanism to identify risks, capitalize on opportunities and sustain and grow our state's investment in service as a strategy. While aspirational, it is also realistic. Serve Washington staff will monitor the plan and make revisions as necessary. In addition, Serve Washington staff and the commission will review the goals and objectives on an annual basis.

### Some say serve, some say volunteer and some just do.

Regardless of the action, when we talk about our state service plan, we are talking about creating a culture where being engaged in making one's community more resilient is the goal. It's possible when individuals say, "It's who I am, it's what I do and it's how I show up for my people, my community."



## STATE SERVICE PLAN PRINCIPLES AND ROLES

In writing this plan, Serve Washington affirms the following principles that guide our work:

- **All types of service strengthen our state.**  
Let us not forget the value of informal channels such as helping a neighbor who is homebound by doing their shopping or mowing their lawn, babysitting a neighbor's child without payment or coaching a sports team.
- **Volunteerism and national service are fundamental to engaged and resilient communities.**  
Let us grow opportunities so all Washingtonians have an opportunity to serve.
- **Volunteerism and national service create pathways to future opportunity.**  
Let us reinforce pathways by investing in the leadership skills of those serving and developing earned benefits for those who serve.
- **High-quality volunteer and national service programs must be planned, managed and supported.**  
Let us find ways to support the skills and capacity of the individuals leading volunteer and national service programs.
- **Strategies to deploy service must be designed in partnership with anchor institutions and guided by locally identified needs.**  
Let us balance our approach and requirements with being responsive to community and organizational need.

This plan outlines Serve Washington's role in:

- Inspiring service as a strategy to meet local community and organizational needs.
- Nurturing our culture of service.
- Supporting connections among parties in the volunteer ecosystem.
- Developing and supporting high-quality national service and volunteer experiences and programs.



# OUR APPROACH TO GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICE IN WASHINGTON

Over the course of developing the plan, we refined our ideas of intended impacts and indicators; designed and implemented a methodology that used both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data; identified themes and findings; and considered the implications of those findings to the state service plan's development.

Accordingly, Serve Washington launched a statewide needs assessment in 2018 and completed it in 2019. This assessment comprised: 1) a review of statewide data; 2) an online survey; 3) stakeholder focus groups and listening sessions; and 4) key informant interviews.

## STATEWIDE DATA REVIEW

Serve Washington staff conducted a review of county level data from a variety of sources, including the [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program](#), Washington State Office of Financial Management's Forecasting and Research division, Washington State Department of Health, Census.gov, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Department of Employment Security and [datacenter.kidscount.org](#). These sources were reviewed to examine need based on key indicators such as poverty, unemployment, education and health. This county-level data was then compared to the number of national service members and service locations in each county.

## ONLINE SURVEY

Serve Washington staff conducted an online survey to gather input on community needs and the level of awareness and engagement with national service and personal volunteerism. The survey also looked at needs related to volunteer management and recognition. Of the more than 615 individuals who began the survey, 518, or 84% completed it. Respondents represented a variety of national service organizations, nonprofits, local government agencies, faith-based organizations and more.

Out of Washington's 39 counties, 17 had no or one respondent. These 17 counties are primarily rural, but nonetheless reflect a gap in data collection. The majority of respondents, 53%, described living in an urban area while 16.6% described living in a rural area and 28.2% in a suburban area.

We asked respondents to select their race/ethnicity and allowed them to select all that apply. Responses (N=518; 97 respondents skipped this item) showed differences in proportion to the population of Washington, according to 2018 census population estimates. There were fewer Asian (4% on the survey versus 9% of the state) and Hispanic/Latinx respondents (4.5% on the survey versus 13% of the state) and an overrepresentation of white/Caucasian respondents (83% on the survey versus 79% of the state). The proportion of respondents who selected "American Indian or Alaskan Native" and "Black or African American" closely matches those in the state, according to 2018 census population estimates.



## STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS AND LISTENING SESSIONS

Serve Washington staff conducted a series of informal and formal focus groups and listening sessions with AmeriCorps program representatives, college students, nonprofit leaders, volunteer managers, Retired and Senior Volunteer Program directors and tribal leaders.

Several key themes emerged from these sessions:

- National service often emphasizes the role of service in meeting unmet community needs. While meeting unmet needs is important, we heard that we must continue to emphasize and invest in service as an opportunity path for members and invest in their leadership opportunities and skills.
- Both the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing were mentioned as challenges impacting national service member recruitment and retention. Additionally, we received comments that these two factors may have unintended consequences related to service being accessible to all Washingtonians.
- Service leaders requested learning, networking and convening opportunities to strengthen volunteer management skills and increase cross-sector collaborations.
- Service and volunteerism need a cultural context to be responsive and appropriate for a community need.
- Strengthening service and volunteer opportunities requires greater collaboration and investment across government, business, philanthropic and nonprofit organizations.





## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Serve Washington staff completed key informant interviews using an evaluation research model developed by [Dialogues in Action](#). A part of this process included refining Serve Washington's intended impacts and suggesting what we might evaluate in the future to measure our success in building an ethic of service. The interviews were designed to discover what community members think is needed to sustain, lead and grow service initiatives across the state. Our questions were anchored on the following three intentions:

1. Members experience service as a pathway to opportunity.
2. Organizations demonstrate service leadership and are invested in national service and volunteer programs.
3. Organizations have increased knowledge and capacity to use service as a strategy.

We designed an in-depth interview protocol and selected a representative sample of 22 individuals. To do so, we used a purposeful stratified sampling technique, which means we selected individuals using the following criteria:

- All streams of national services: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA and Senior Corps; partnering CERT organizations; volunteer centers; and individuals who have expressed an interest in receiving our funding opportunities.
- High-, medium- and low-touch organizations: organizations that already partner with Serve Washington as a national service subgrantee to organizations that have attended or signed up to be on our request for grant application email notice list but have no formal affiliation with Serve Washington.
- Geographic location sorting: by western Seattle, western state-not Seattle, eastern state and statewide.



## IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS, PATTERNS AND INSIGHTS

Through these data collection processes, we identified data gaps, patterns and key insights. The most significant insights are described in the following narrative.

### ALIGNMENT OF NATIONAL SERVICE RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

We compared areas of high need in Washington with the number of national service members currently serving in that area. We found that Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Mason, Wahkiakum and Yakima counties had the most significant needs and fewest national service resources (AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA and Senior Corps were examined). Data filtered by veterans and military families showed that the high-needs counties were Island, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Spokane.

Serve Washington elected to narrow review of county data to areas that align with national service focus areas of economic opportunity, education, healthy futures, children and youth, and opioids. This focus is not to be over-valued. We recognize that for national service to be effective, it must be responsive to not just federal trends, but also to local and state trends such as environmental work and tribal priorities.

In the online survey, participants were asked what they see as the five most critical unmet needs in their community. Those responses in descending order were:

1. Economic opportunity – housing services and/or housing affordability/availability for low-income individuals, families and people with disabilities. (60.16%; N=370)
2. Health – services for mental health. (48.13%; N=296)
3. Health – access to health insurance and/or preventive and primary health care services and programs. (28.78%; N=177)
4. Child wellness – reducing and/or preventing adverse childhood experiences. (27.97%; N=172)
5. Economic opportunity – job placement services and/or job training. (23.90%; N=147)

In addition to identifying what they see as areas of high need, participants could provide comments. These reiterated the affordable housing/homelessness concern and raised the need for child care/day care/services for preschool-aged children.

Individuals who participated in the online survey told us they:

- Believe there are opportunities to volunteer in their community. (95.7%; N=534)
- Believe that service/volunteerism could play a role in addressing needs identified. (87.32%; N=537).
- Think national service programs are making a positive impact in Washington communities. (65.41%; N=382)





## COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

While the responses on awareness of community volunteerism are positive, we learned that fewer than 50% of survey participants were aware of the various national service programs. (AmeriCorps State and National have the most awareness among survey participants.) When asked if they knew how to access national service resources, 42% responded no and 42% responded yes. The remainder responded not applicable. When we asked about barriers to expanding national service, the lack of affordable housing for service members and the lack of awareness of national service resources were the top two responses. Organizational funding/match funding and the low living allowance were also common themes.

## COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERISM

While our work has been strongest in the national service area, we have distinct responsibilities for supporting community-based volunteerism. In 2018, Washington ranked 17th for volunteer rates. Even at that ranking, the volunteer contribution to our state is significant, with 202.2 million service hours contributed, representing a value of \$4.8 billion. Clearly the impact of volunteerism is valuable to Washington communities. Knowing that, and knowing that our ranking has fallen from 9 to 17 since 2012, it was important for our data gathering to include community volunteerism questions.

## ENGAGING WITH VOLUNTEERS

In our online survey, more than 55% of respondents indicated they work with volunteers in a professional capacity. When asked about the challenges in engaging volunteers, we heard that volunteer programs have insufficient resources to support volunteer engagement. Research conducted by Reimagining Service partners, which included Common Good Careers, Deloitte, the Taproot Foundation, the RGK Center for Philanthropy at the University of Texas and the TCC Group, has shown that for an organization operating a volunteer program — and for a community to realize the full benefit of volunteerism — key principles must be in place:

- Individuals and organizations within the volunteer ecosystem must collaborate.
- Volunteering must be a core strategic function, not an add-on.
- Volunteer engagement should focus on true community needs.
- To see a return, you have to invest.

The top areas identified as under-resourced were volunteer engagement and volunteer recruitment. So while we know many organizations and communities are doing good work through volunteerism, they are likely not achieving the full return of what limited investment they are making.

## CHALLENGES TO FINDING THE RIGHT VOLUNTEERS

Organizations with [high-quality volunteer program attributes](#), such as planning and development, leadership support, resource allocation, tracking and evaluation, outreach, effective training and partnering to extend outreach still face barriers to finding the right number and the right skilled volunteers. Survey participants identified these challenges: 1) people do not have personal time (58%); 2) people do not know about volunteer opportunities (56%); and 3) people feel disconnected from their community (43%).







## We heard that ...

Organizations are more successful in running volunteer and national service programs when there is leadership buy-in, as shown through allocation of resources, the development of staff leading this effort and awareness, and appreciation of the impact of the work of the volunteer and national service members.

Additional comments emphasized the following:

- While opportunities exist, they do not fit with people's skills/interests or time availability (i.e., require too long of a commitment or are only during work hours).
- People are struggling with poverty and trying to earn an income to meet basic needs, so volunteering isn't feasible.
- Organizational issues related to volunteer management create barriers (e.g., organizations not supporting the volunteer program/not having adequate staffing or resources/not knowing how to effectively use volunteers).



What we heard was reinforced when we analyzed the qualitative data from our key informant interviews and resulted in the statements below that guide our action plan:

- To sustain and grow opportunities for Washingtonians to serve or volunteer, we must continue to support and build service leaders.
- We need to make investing in service and volunteerism an easy, bottom-line decision.
- People manage volunteer and national service programs because they want to help the individuals serving to grow and gain skills. It is with this sense of purpose that these managers then work on compliance matters and grow their own development skills. It's this personal connection — more than any single overarching reason — that leads managers to apply service as a strategy. Preserving this tie is imperative in meeting our objective as a funder to both sustain and grow national service and volunteer programs in our state.

Our strategic direction is guided by the goals included in this plan and are a response to the understanding we gained from this data gathering processes. The plan does not reflect everything we hope to accomplish, nor does it represent a binding set of directives, because the planning process must be fluid and flexible. It will, however, serve as the framework by which we will make decisions, focus our resources and work to expand our reach.





## STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

1

### **Goal 1: By 2022, all 39 counties will directly benefit from national service or volunteer resources**

Washington has 39 counties. When examining how Washingtonians can get involved in service or volunteering, we discovered that resources across three areas, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Volunteer Centers, were not available in three counties, and 13 currently offer only one of those resources. Serve Washington both distributes resources and partners with CNCS and subgrantees to support service and volunteerism resources in our state. This goal is about better understanding individual county needs and making sure service resources such as funding, national service members (State and National, NCCC, Vista and Senior Corps) and/or volunteers, training events, service events, and leadership or program convenings benefit all counties.

2

### **Goal 2: Serve Washington will identify barriers experienced by marginalized communities to participation in service and volunteerism and take steps to remove them.**

We will provide all Washingtonians an opportunity to contribute their full measure of talent and perspective through service, and will support national service programs and volunteer leaders to create and sustain a service network that practices cultural awareness and humility. To do this effectively, we need to understand the barriers that we unintentionally create or uphold. Our success will be measured by the barriers we address.

3

### **Goal 3: Serve Washington will partner with nonprofits, business, philanthropy and government to develop additional resources and funding sources to grow our state's foundation of civic engagement with service.**

We heard throughout the data gathering process that service and volunteer programs are under-resourced. Resources are allocated by leaders, and that service leadership takes place at all levels within an organization, a community and a state. With this goal, we hope to connect with, sustain and build a network of service leaders. In our vision, these leaders demonstrate their commitment to service by leveraging their resources and connections so that service is deployed as a strategy to meet organizational missions and community needs.

The strategic direction and achievement of our plan is supported through use of a dashboard that breaks goals into objectives and are assigned to a lead who tracks progress achievement of annual milestones.