



# Boomers and National Service

## Learning from the Success of Youth Service

CIVIC VENTURES POLICY SERIES

Shirley Sagawa



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# Introduction

We are a nation rich with experience and rife with challenges. The aging of 77 million baby boomers—the first of whom turned 60 in 2006—provides an unprecedented opportunity to make a productive match between our talents and our needs. By engaging experienced, older adults to help meet gaping social needs, we can offset the inevitable costs of an aging population with incalculable gain.

We can... but will we? America today is unprepared to capitalize on this extraordinary opportunity. The world of “senior volunteering” is not likely to appeal to baby boomers. We need to invent a whole new form of engagement to meet the needs of those in a new stage of life and work, between the end of midlife careers and true old age. That won’t happen by magic. Unleashing this vast human potential will require national action, action the federal government can help set in motion.

The paper you’re about to read tells the compelling story of the youth service movement in the late 1980s and the role the federal government played in its substantial success. A key moment in this struggle, as this paper shows, was the creation of a bipartisan commission of prominent Americans charged with making policy recommendations to the President and Congress on the topic of national service.

As you’ll see, the original proposals for this Commission on National and Community Service included provisions for older adult service, but they were dropped along the way. This unfinished business begs to be completed—and quickly—as we stand on the brink of the retirement of huge numbers of public-spirited Americans.

Those of us interested in engaging boomers in meeting our country’s challenges can learn much from the early days of the youth service movement. And there could be no better teacher to shed light on these lessons and explain their relevance than Shirley Sagawa. We are deeply honored that Shirley, one of the most accomplished, smartest people in Washington and one of the founders of the youth service movement, agreed to write this paper. You can learn more about her and her many contributions on the last page of this report.



John S. Gomperts  
*President, Civic Ventures and  
CEO, Experience Corps*

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## ABOUT THE SERIES

*The Civic Ventures Policy Series seeks to provoke discussion and prompt new policy initiatives that will help America transform the aging of the baby boom generation from a crisis into an opportunity. The series is funded by The UPS Foundation.*

# Boomers and National Service: Learning from the Success of Youth Service

Shirley Sagawa

Over the last several decades, commissions have played an important role in building consensus for policy innovations, from Social Security and education to philanthropy and federal public service.<sup>1</sup> A commission strategy is often useful when an issue has clearly risen on the public agenda, but a wide variety of approaches prevents a clear consensus for action from emerging. Volunteer service by older adults fits this profile. Advocates concerned with the long-term health of older Americans, groups interested in finding new resources to help at-risk youth, and activists interested in civic participation have all identified expanding service opportunities for baby boomers as a bold new strategy to achieve their goals. And yet, with no clear roadmap, new policies and programs may take years to emerge. In such a case, a commission may offer a useful way to quickly advance action in this area.

The Commission on National and Community Service, created in the early 1990s, played such a role for service by youth and young adults. This paper describes the activity that led to the enactment of legislation creating this Commission. It lays out the work of the Commission, its political history, and its implications for the larger-scale national service legislation proposed by President Bill Clinton. Finally, it suggests ways in which this earlier service commission offers lessons for a commission focused on service by the baby boom generation.

## SUPPORT FOR YOUTH SERVICE

In the mid-1980s, a grassroots youth service movement emerged and began to attract notice. Innovative service-learning programs were launched on college

campuses, youth corps blended job training and remedial education with service, and students were learning through service at innovative schools and community organizations across the country.<sup>2</sup> Out of these programs emerged model programs, movement leaders, and advocates for youth service of every sort. Coalitions of youth service organizations, college presidents, university students, and youth corps directors formed and began to speak out.<sup>3</sup>

While some of these leaders saw federal funding as the key to scaling their efforts, not everyone agreed. Some believed that federal funding might squelch the youth and grassroots leadership that was critical to the movement. “I’m not sure legislation is a good idea,” said one such leader who came to lobby Senate staff. “But if there is legislation, it ought to build on grassroots programs.”

**Author’s note:** I served in several capacities during the time period covered by this paper—as a staff person to Senator Edward Kennedy, responsible for national service legislation; a vice-chair of the Commission on National and Community Service; the coordinator of the Coalition on National and Community Service; a member of the Clinton White House Domestic Policy Council staff; and managing director of the Corporation for National Service. While I have attempted to support assertions in this paper with material created by others, the information in this paper is mainly drawn from my personal experience and therefore reflects my own limited perspective, which may be different from that of others.

<sup>1</sup> Nittoli, Janice, *Acts of Commission: Lessons from an Informal Study*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Sagawa, Shirley, *Ten Years of Youth in Service to America*, American Youth Policy Forum, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Youth Service America (YSA), Campus Compact, Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), and the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) were among the most organized and well-recognized of these groups.

With this kind of ambivalence, it might well have taken a decade for federal youth service legislation to move. Over the previous two decades, dozens of influential members of Congress had proposed a wide variety of national service bills proposing everything from a youth service commission to a full-blown recreation of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Supporters argued that youth service did everything from increasing civic engagement to helping kids learn math. Despite these many claims, youth service was widely regarded as something that was “nice but not necessary” or “a solution in search of a problem.”<sup>5</sup> It seemed an unlikely beneficiary of public dollars at a time when deficits were high and federal support for the nonprofit sector had been declining dramatically for over a decade.<sup>6</sup>

**The election of George H. W. Bush, who had promised a move from free market conservatism to a “kinder, gentler nation,” shifted the political winds. President Bush saw volunteer service as a key part of America’s future success.**

However, the election of George H. W. Bush, who had promised a move from free-market conservatism to a “kinder, gentler nation,” shifted the political winds. President Bush saw volunteer service as a key part of America’s future success. At the Republican Convention where he was nominated, he paid tribute to the spirit of volunteering: “For we are a nation of communities, of thousands and tens of thousands of ethnic, religious, social, business, labor union, neighborhood, regional and other organizations, all of them varied, voluntary, and unique... a brilliant

diversity spread like stars, like *a thousand points of light* in a broad and peaceful sky” (*italics added*).<sup>7</sup> He created the White House Office of National Service to explore options to support Americans in their voluntary efforts.

During the same time period, influential reports were issued calling policymakers’ attention to service as a strategy for achieving youth development and community improvements. The William T. Grant Foundation’s “Forgotten Half” report recommended youth corps and service-learning as promising ways to help at-risk youth succeed.<sup>8</sup> The activist group People for the American Way called for youth service as an antidote to the decline in civic engagement among young people of the “me generation.” And the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)—a moderate alternative to the perceived liberalism of the party’s past—caught policymakers’ attention with a bold new proposal—a civilian GI Bill.<sup>9</sup> This idea might have been merely a big spender—the DLC’s own estimates put the cost of the higher education vouchers alone at more than \$7 billion dollars a year,<sup>10</sup> six times the entire Head Start budget.<sup>11</sup> But it came with a twist—the DLC would pay for the program by eliminating federal financial aid, requiring anyone who wanted money for college to serve in either the military or civilian national service programs.

## THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ACT OF 1990

Senator Sam Nunn, a conservative Democrat from Georgia who chaired both the DLC and the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced the DLC proposal in Congress. Because of the legislation’s implications for education policy, it was referred to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee,

<sup>4</sup> Warner, Jean, *A Policy Study of Youth Service: Synthesizing analysis of policy content and policy process over time*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oklahoma Graduate College, 1995, pp. 5-9. Warner’s thorough report documents in great detail the legislative path of the National and Community Service Act of 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Warner, p. 52, citing Bubb, Frank, “National Service: A Solution in Search of a Problem,” *Human Events*, August 6, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, Anne Lowrey, “The Reagan Years: Profound Changes for Philanthropy,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, October 25, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Warner, p. 106, citing Noonan, Peggy, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era*, 1990, p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> William T. Grant Foundation, *The Forgotten Half*.

<sup>9</sup> Democratic Leadership Council, *Citizenship and National Service: A Blueprint for Civic Enterprise*, 1988, available online at [http://www.dlc.org/ndol\\_ci.cfm?contentid=250409&kaid=115&subid=145](http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=250409&kaid=115&subid=145).

<sup>10</sup> Democratic Leadership Council.

<sup>11</sup> <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/partlist.htm#earlyeducation>

chaired by Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Kennedy had serious concerns about the DLC proposal—beginning with its price tag and ending with its elimination of financial aid. But he was supportive of the idea of national service and wanted to find a way to advance the concept, which was strongly identified with President Kennedy’s call to service of the 1960s, without doing damage to the student aid programs he had long championed. “[T]he concept of service today is an unknown antidote to the excessive appeals of selfishness in recent years,” he would later note in hearings on service legislation.<sup>12</sup> “The ‘me decade’ is ending, and it is time now to renew President Kennedy’s challenge for our own day and generation.”

Just as important, Senator Kennedy had begun to hear from family and friends and constituents that they wanted to see legislation. These advocates included brother-in-law Sargent Shriver and niece Kathleen Townsend; Harris Wofford, a long-time family friend who had served in President Kennedy’s administration; and constituents Alan Khazei and Michael Brown from City Year in Boston. People for the American Way also came forward offering to put its considerable lobbying resources toward support of a K-12 service proposal, which it saw as a strategy to address a problem it had identified through research conducted by pollster Peter Hart: that young people “had only the barest notion of what citizenship involves.”<sup>13</sup> Deciding to develop his own legislation, Senator Kennedy charged his staff first with developing a student service program, and then with bringing together the key Senate supporters of different service programs to see if they could be combined in a bill that would move.

A hodge-podge of concepts took shape as a multi-titled bill.<sup>14</sup> It offered Senator Kennedy’s service-learning proposal paired with Senator Bob Graham’s (D-FL) proposal to promote volunteers in schools; Senator Chris Dodd’s (D-CT) youth corps title; and a demonstration version of Senator Nunn’s national service proposal combined with a part-time national

service concept modeled on the national guard by Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Senator John McCain (R-AZ). Importantly, while participants in the civilian Nunn-Mikulski programs would receive an education voucher<sup>15</sup> of \$8,500 for full time service, and \$3,000 for part-time, the legislation would not reduce their—or anyone’s—federal financial aid. The bill’s purposes reflected the many reasons different constituencies supported national service:

- to renew the ethic of civic responsibility
- to engage people in service
- to improve the life chances of young people through literacy and job skills
- to remove barriers to service created by high education and housing costs and loan indebtedness
- to generate additional service hours to meet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs.

**“The ‘me decade’ is ending, and it is time now to renew President Kennedy’s challenge for our own day and generation.”**

SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY

Youth service organizations, loosely organized by Youth Service America’s “Working Group,” had concerns about specific provisions but, in general, they embraced the proposal and worked hard for its passage. Although organizations interested in service by older adults followed the legislation closely, they did not push for new senior service programs. At Senate hearings, the Washington Representative for Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP asked that these existing programs not be duplicated, but instead serve as the foundation of national service initiatives. Senator Kennedy included pieces to expand the three senior service programs as well as VISTA in the comprehensive legislation. The DLC proposal had included provisions for a Senior Citizens Corps. But with the heavy focus on development of young citizens and student aid, this provision, while retained in the demonstration program

<sup>12</sup> 1989 Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee hearings on S. 1430.

<sup>13</sup> 1989 hearings, p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> S. 1430

<sup>15</sup> In some bills, the voucher could also be used for housing and small business start-up.

in the form of “Special Senior Service” participants, received little attention. Advocates for older adults did urge the inclusion of language requiring states to “give preference to agencies and organizations that recruit, train, and place senior volunteers.”<sup>16</sup>

The agency that would house the program might have presented a major stumbling block—the Department of Education was one logical choice given the many education-related aspects of the legislation. But that would put the program under the Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee, where it would compete with financial aid. If the new programs were housed in an independent agency, the subcommittee jurisdiction could shift to the HUD-VA-Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee chaired by Senator Mikulski. There they would not compete with student aid and, even better, Senator Mikulski as chair could virtually guarantee that the programs would be funded. To effect this jurisdictional shift, Senator Mikulski proposed the creation of a new Corporation that would administer the new programs. Although advocates pushed for a private-sector Corporation similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, legislative counsel contended that such an arrangement would be unconstitutional, given the commission’s role in administering federal grants.

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee reported out the bill with a bipartisan vote of 11 to 4. Senate support, however, did not assure that the House Committee would be as hospitable. Senate staff worked closely with House Education and Labor Committee staff to develop the package, and Senator Kennedy lobbied members tirelessly, even making personal visits to junior Republican House committee members. Nonetheless, the proposal received only lukewarm support from liberal committee members who saw it as the first step toward the full-blown DLC program, which they strongly opposed. Conservative Republicans also opposed the bill on the grounds that it “paid volunteers” and might undermine military recruitment by offering a safer but still lucrative alternative. While it was likely that both houses of Congress could pass the bill with slim majorities given

the Democratic control of Congress, it would be impossible to override a Presidential veto.

President Bush, although following the legislation closely with a view toward possible support, had an alternative vision for national service. Providing living allowances to full-time volunteers did not sit well with many of his supporters. Nor did the bill’s price tag—although the multi-billion DLC concept had been scaled back dramatically, the Senate proposal called for \$300 million in federal spending in its first year. To formulate his proposal, President Bush had appointed an advisory commission chaired by New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean to explore how to encourage “volunteer service [that] can get at the root cause of many social ills by restoring a sense of community and engagement.”<sup>17</sup> This Advisory Group issued its report on January 4, 1990, calling for an electronic bulletin board, a public service advertising campaign, and other public exhortation techniques. Bush went on to put forward an idea of his own—for a privately funded foundation named for the “thousand points of light” he had so often evoked.

**President Bush had appointed an advisory commission to explore how to encourage “volunteer service [that] can get at the root cause of many social ills by restoring a sense of community and engagement.”**

Bush’s national service advisor, Gregg Petersmeyer, had kept an open door throughout the process, meeting with staff of Senator Kennedy and Labor Committee ranking Republican Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) as well as national service advocates. Although no deal had been struck, Senator Kennedy agreed with Senator Hatch to reduce funding for the bill to \$125 million over two years, to reduce the amount of the education voucher from \$8,500 to \$5,000 for full-time participants, combine the three major programs into a single grant program administered through the states, and include funding for the Points of Light

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum to David Evans, staff director, Senator Pell, from Cynthia Costello, Villers Advocacy Associates, June 13, 1989, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Warner p. 150.

Foundation. After three days of debate and 30 amendments, the Senate passed the bill on March 1, 1990, by a vote of 78 to 19.

The House followed with its own bill in March 1990, drafted by Education and Labor Committee Chairman Gus Hawkins (D-CA). Seeing the potential of youth service to engage at-risk youth, he used his political skill to create a proposal that would appeal to a majority of Committee Democrats, despite their strong opposition to the DLC plan. The Committee bill proposed the creation of the American Conservation and Youth Service Corps targeted to disadvantaged youth. It had no money for the Points of Light Foundation or a national service demonstration program and no linkage between youth service activities and student financial assistance. A few months later, the House passed the bill on a voice vote.

In only four weeks following the House passage, House and Senate conferees worked out a compromise with each other and the White House. This compromise package included \$5 million for the Points of Light Foundation and \$62 million for the other programs. It retained Senator Hatch's proposal that the major programs be administered through a consolidated proposal from the State's governor, but included the three major programs (service-learning, youth corps, and a full-time and part-time national service demonstration program). Following quick consideration and passage by both houses of Congress, President Bush signed the bill on November 16, 1990, without fanfare.<sup>18</sup>

## THE COMMISSION ON NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

In the course of the legislative process, Congress made a small but critical change. The Senate-passed bill had changed the Corporation for National Service into a Commission on National and Community Service. This provision was retained in the House-Senate Conference. The initial concept for a commission provided for a bipartisan board with members appointed by both houses of Congress and

the President. This had been the model for other commissions, particularly those intended to make policy recommendations. The Justice Department, however, considered this appointments process to be unconstitutional when a commission would be not only making policy recommendations, but also performing the executive branch function of grants administration. In an agreement to gain the President's support, House and Senate sponsors agreed to move technical amendments that would provide for the President to appoint and the Senate to confirm all 21 appointed Commission members.

### The First Commission

President Bush's appointees to the Commission, eventually named in Fall 1991, were diverse in almost every way. They included:

- **Tom Ehrlich**, University of Indiana president
- **Dan Evans**, former Senator and Governor
- **Maria Hernandez Ferrier**, community services director for a school district
- **Frances Hesselbein**, president of the Drucker Foundation and former president of the Girl Scouts
- **Alan Khazei**, co-founder of City Year
- **Reatha Clark King**, director of the General Mills Foundation
- **Les Lenkowsky**, conservative thought-leader
- **Pete McCloskey**, former Congressman who had introduced national service legislation while a member of the House
- **Wayne Meisel**, founder of the Campus Outreach Opportunity League
- **Digger Phelps**, former Notre Dame basketball coach
- **George Romney**, former Governor and Presidential candidate
- **Shirley Sagawa**, former staff person to Senator Edward Kennedy
- **Johnnie Smith**, African American minister
- **Glen White**, expert on independent living for the disabled
- **Gayle Wilson**, First Lady of California

*Note: In addition, heads of five cabinet agencies and ACTION were designated as **ex-officio** members of the Commission.*

<sup>18</sup> Warner.

In an effort to keep the Commission from being controlled by the White House, the legislation empowered the Commissioners to choose their own officers and hire their own staff. At its first “administrative” meeting, held in the White House on September 25, 1991, the Commissioners looked for signals from White House advisor Gregg Petersmeyer, but he remained circumspect about his preferences. The Commissioners elected former Congressman Pete McCloskey as their chair, along with three vice chairs, and formed committees to review regulations and conduct long-term planning.<sup>19</sup>

At Commissioner Tom Ehrlich’s urging, the Commission hired Stanford Haas Center Director Catherine Milton as its executive director. Milton had been an early leader in the service movement through her role running a leading campus-based service center and helping to create Campus Compact. Milton’s knowledge of the service field and her political experience (she had played a leading role expanding the role of women in policing) proved to be important assets to the Commission.

In accordance with its responsibility to design and administer programs, the Commission was responsible for developing its own regulations and application process, and for selecting grantees and studying their results. The K-12 service-learning program ran by formula—a strategic decision made by the Senate Labor Committee to see that every State Education Agency had an incentive to promote service-learning. Other programs for higher education institutions, youth corps, and national service demonstration programs provided for competitive grants, informed by peer review. To guide this decisionmaking, Commissioner Frances Hesselbein, drawing on her deep understanding of nonprofit programs, promoted three criteria to the planning committee: quality, innovation, replicability. To these, the staff added sustainability.<sup>20</sup> These were adopted by the Commission as its major criteria, and staff came to call these

selection rules “QIRS.” Commissioner and social entrepreneur Alan Khazei recommended that the Commission consider the developmental stages of programs—allowing for support to span the continuum of start-time to expansion of established programs. This recommendation was similarly followed in practice.

The Commission held its first grant competition in Spring 1992. In its first year, the Commission reviewed 504 applications and made 154 grants.<sup>21</sup> The competition resulted in a portfolio of eight national service demonstration programs (see sidebar).

### Class of '92

The Commission for National and Community Service provided its first national service demonstration grants to the following eight organizations:

- **City Year**, which was able to expand its Boston corps from 50 to 220 members;<sup>22</sup>
- **The Delta Service Corps**, a new, three-state program focusing on addressing the needs identified by the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission;
- **The Georgia Peach Corps**, a team-based rural corps;
- **Pennsylvania Service Corps**, which planned to use participants as community service leaders in local organizations, such as schools, youth corps, and college campuses;
- **Volunteer Maryland!**, a mostly part-time program intended to involve participants in recruiting additional volunteers;
- **The New Jersey Urban Schools Service Corps**, a planning grant for a corps that would place participants in urban schools;
- **The Oklahoma Health Care Volunteers**, which would engage welfare recipients in health care organizations to help them begin careers in the health care field; and
- **Language Link**, a program designed by the Seneca Nation to pair young Indians with elders who would teach them the Seneca language as they helped the older Tribe members live independently.

<sup>19</sup> Summary Notes from the September 25, 1991 meeting.

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum to Dan Evans, Pete McCloskey, and Shirley Sagawa from Catherine Milton, January 7, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Commission on National and Community Service, *What You Can Do for Your Country*, January 1993, p. xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Khazei, City Year co-founder and Commission member, recused himself on matters concerning the grant competition.



The demonstration programs that were chosen represented a departure from past national service policy in several important ways. First, they engaged new sponsors—most of which had never before applied for federal funding, including other service programs. Second, they engaged a broad range of participants—including women on public assistance, Indian youth, and older adults—and included both targeted and diverse programs. Finally, these participants performed many different types of service, from volunteer recruitment to community development.

With a Presidential election as backdrop, and with both candidates talking about national service, the Commission was eager to ensure that its work would be relevant after the election. Although it was not mandated to issue a formal report, merely to “advise the President and the Congress concerning developments in national and community service,” it decided early on to issue a public report.<sup>23</sup> And realizing that most reports in Washington end up on a dusty shelf, the staff hired a team of writers and researchers—including experienced journalists—to visit programs and work with the Commission to draft a highly readable report.

**They called for programs to meet four objectives—meet unmet needs; enhance the development of participants; bring diverse participants together; and strengthen the community service network as a whole.**

A subcommittee of the Commission board, headed by Les Lenkowsky, oversaw the project. Most aspects of the report moved forward with consensus, with one exception—the report’s recommendations relating to the national service demonstration programs. The team of writers felt strongly that the report should endorse universal service; they had been impressed by what they saw in the field and believed in the potential of national service to train a generation of highly

engaged citizens. Several Commission members disagreed. While they could support some level of expansion, the scale envisioned by the writing team was far beyond what they viewed as reasonable.

Ultimately the Commission members agreed to recommend 100,000 members—far fewer than the number preferred by the writers or Senate sponsors of the demonstration, but nonetheless a dramatic expansion of existing full-time service slots. They recommended that service be voluntary but widespread and that cost-of-living stipends be provided. They called for programs to meet four objectives—meet unmet needs; enhance the development of participants; bring diverse participants together; and strengthen the community service network as a whole. Participation would be open to all, but mainly focused on youth, and would respond to local needs, although some programs might be federally operated.

## AMERICORPS

During the shaping of the report, Presidential candidate Bill Clinton proposed a domestic GI Bill that would provide money for college to young people, regardless of their economic situation, who agreed to spend a year or two in service as teachers, police officers, child care workers or otherwise “doing work our country desperately needs.”<sup>24</sup> A leader in the Democratic Leadership Council, Clinton initially retained but subsequently dropped the tie to student financial aid. He found that the proposal drew enthusiastic support at virtually every campaign stop.<sup>25</sup> Knowing this, the Commission members believed that their report could prove to be an important document if Clinton were to become President. The Commission’s work to date had drawn little public notice, despite the fact that “the ‘service movement’ and the [C]ommission had created... a web of seventy-five new programs, involving fifteen thousand full-time participants—double the size of the Peace Corps and VISTA combined.”<sup>26</sup> Hoping that the likely

<sup>23</sup> The Commission on National and Community Service, *First Year Work Plan Discussion Draft*, December 18, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton for President, *A Plan for America's Future*, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Waldman, Steven, *The Bill*, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Waldman, p. 40.

new President would take notice, the group rushed the report to press. The 130-page report, “What You Can Do For Your Country,” was published in January 1993, the month that President Clinton took the oath of office.

Although the report had been issued, the Commission continued to receive funding to administer the National and Community Service Act programs. Commission staffers, along with their counterparts from the much-larger ACTION agency, were called upon to advise and assist Clinton White House staffers, who were led by Eli Segal, the new director of the White House Office of National Service. They offered technical advice, as well as background on the politics of service, a topic new to Segal and many of his colleagues. Even before the Clinton legislation was enacted, Commission staff was planning the new programs, engaging business consultant Sue Lehmann to help make the programs more outcome-focused. The Commission also worked with the White House to plan a “Summer of Service” demonstration in 1993, which taught everyone involved about the practical challenges involved.

President Clinton proposed his national service legislation in March 1993, pushing Congress to pass the bill quickly.<sup>27</sup> There were many similarities with the previous legislation, which provided the foundation for the new proposals. Clinton’s bill expanded the existing K-12 and college service-learning programs but left them largely unchanged. It also included funding for the Points of Light Foundation, in keeping with a personal promise that President Clinton had made to former President Bush.

The Commission’s national service demonstration programs had important implications for the development of the centerpiece of President Clinton’s national service proposal, which would later become known as AmeriCorps. As the original DLC proposal, AmeriCorps would operate on a large scale, with hundreds of thousands serving across the country. But unlike the original DLC proposal, AmeriCorps would place its members largely in private sector programs selected by a competitive process similar to the process created by the Commission.

Even with this decentralized structure, the size of the program was a major stumbling block due to cost. The Bush-appointed Commission’s report, however, gave cover for a proposal of 100,000 members.

Most of the serious negotiations around the bill focused on its administrative elements. The Commission and ACTION agency would be merged into a new agency responsible for all service programs, including VISTA and the senior service programs then administered by ACTION. It would be governed by a CEO appointed by the President, but would retain a Board similar to the Commission’s board. Because the effort would require a significant administrative infrastructure, governor-appointed state commissions would be responsible for distributing the bulk of the funding, which brought the support of the National Governors Association. These governor-appointed commissions were modeled on the National and Community Service Commission—designed to have enough independence and bipartisan support to weather political upheavals.

**AmeriCorps was certainly open to older Americans, but the Commission and the new legislation left the field of senior volunteer service largely unchanged.**

Substantively, the programs were largely unchanged from the previously authorized programs with several exceptions. Education awards would be held in a trust fund rather than being administered by individual programs. The earlier Youth Corps title was merged into the larger AmeriCorps program. And the rules for “special senior service participants” were eliminated. While there was no upper age limit for AmeriCorps, older Americans were subject to the same requirements and would receive the same benefits as the young adult participants who were the targets of the program. AmeriCorps was certainly open to older Americans, but the Commission and the new legislation left the field of senior volunteer service largely unchanged.

<sup>27</sup> As a former Commissioner and Senate staffer responsible for national service, I was asked to assist with the White House effort.

Floor debate on the bill recalled the earlier deliberations, with ideological speeches and numerous amendments, most of which were not related to the legislation at hand. Ultimately, President Clinton's bill passed in September 1993, just five months after its introduction. The first AmeriCorps members were sworn in a year later.

## THE IMPACT OF THE COMMISSION

Since 1994, more than 500,000 individuals have served in AmeriCorps. More than \$500 million has been allocated to institutions of higher education and K-12 service programs, and service-learning has greatly expanded as an educational practice, with more than one-third of public schools offering service-learning classes and almost every state educational agency creating a service learning office.<sup>28</sup>

Many people played a role in ensuring the survival of federal national and community service programs, especially leaders in the service field and champions on Capitol Hill. The original Commission on National and Community Service, and the legislation that authorized it, helped secure this success by:

### Expanding innovative approaches to national service

Longstanding national service programs—such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, and Foster Grandparent programs—were narrowly focused on specific issues. In some cases, they were run by the federal government itself or a defined set of local grantees, leaving little room for expansion or innovation. By supporting a diverse set of programs run by a broad range of sponsors, the Commission dramatically expanded the definition of national service and the purposes for which it could be employed. It also took a broad approach to both participants and activities, taking the position that even elementary school children could help address community problems. In this way, the Commission opened up possibilities for service programs to take on new issues—from disaster relief to public education—and to engage Americans

of all backgrounds, including populations previously defined by their needs, not their capabilities.

### Supporting the expansion of field infrastructure

The Commission's First-Year Work Plan placed heavy emphasis on "coalition building," which included building "movement infrastructure," as well as "organization building" through technical assistance and other strategies.<sup>29</sup> By providing grants to "infrastructure" organizations such as Campus Compact and NASCC, a clearinghouse for service learning, technical assistance providers, and program models capable of expanding to new communities, the Commission helped to establish a base for future expansion. Similarly, by requiring a consolidated application from states, and encouraging the appointment of diverse state advisory boards, the Commission and its authorizing legislation laid the groundwork for the more rigorous state-level capacity needed to administer AmeriCorps. At the federal level, the Commission's diverse and talented staff played critical roles in launching AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America.

**The Commission opened up possibilities for service programs to take on new issues and to engage Americans of all backgrounds, including populations previously defined by their needs, not their capabilities.**

### Expanding political and grassroots support

The Commission's First-Year Work Plan included significant focus on forging partnerships with private sector groups, "key foundation people," the Points of Light Foundation, key voluntary agency leaders, religious leaders, "youth development people," and Congress. The legislative process that led to the creation of the Commission had begun a tradition of bipartisanship, and the first round of Bush appointees to the Commission set a precedent followed in future rounds for bipartisan and nonpartisan leadership,

<sup>28</sup> *Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools*, National Center for Education Statistics, September 1999, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=1999043>.

<sup>29</sup> First-Year Work Plan, pp. 2-4.

although this has been tested at times. Furthermore, the Commission made grants in almost every state and to new types of grantees, greatly increasing the visibility of and political base for national service.<sup>30</sup>

### Creating procedures designed to yield quality programming

Catherine Milton brought on board several individuals with business backgrounds to guide the early work of the Commission—former McKinsey partner Julien Phillips and Stanford Business School graduate Cynthia Scherr, in addition to consultant Sue Lehmann. Phillips led the first strategic planning effort for the Commission, using his business knowledge to develop the organization’s work plan and shape the grants process. Ultimately, the Commission created an open, competitive, outcome-focused process to select national service programs that continues to be used for AmeriCorps and other Corporation for National Service competitions as a strategy to ensure quality. The process allowed for weaker programs to be replaced by more promising ones and for program emphasis to shift as national priorities evolved. These programs have attracted broad political support and withstood rigorous Congressional scrutiny over many years.

### Surfacing and addressing important issues

Early on in the legislative process, “hot-button” issues surfaced that might have derailed national service for the short- or even long-term. These included:

- **Church state concerns:** Under what circumstances could religious organizations host national service participants?
- **Displacement of paid workers:** Could a government agency or nonprofit eliminate jobs and then have the work done by full-time national service participants?
- **Political activity:** Could national service participants become involved in lobbying or partisan political activities?
- **Financial aid eligibility:** How would an education award earned through national service affect student aid?

By resolving these issues, sponsors of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Commission took these and other potentially controversial issues off the table. The Commission also deliberated on one of the key issues that would face the AmeriCorps drafters—should all national service programs be required to recruit diverse members?<sup>31</sup> While it did not resolve this issue, its experience with youth corps and the national service demonstration programs, as well as the Summer of Service, expanded knowledge of the implications of this decision.

### Providing evidence that national service was both feasible and effective

Doubts that plagued early national service proposals—Would service amount to “make work”? Would anyone be interested in serving? Would service providers have use for untrained national service volunteers?—dissipated as programs met these challenges. The Commission, taking a long view, contracted for independent evaluations of its four program areas, measuring them against stated objectives. These evaluations, although not completed until long after the Commission had been folded into the Corporation for National and Community Service, served as proof that the programs worked.

### Allowing for rapid scale-up when the time became politically feasible

Without the experience of the Commission and the programs it funded, it might have been impossible for President Clinton’s proposal to be adopted so quickly and on so large a scale. An unknown, untested idea often requires an initial period of experimentation to gain acceptance. The Commission worked exceptionally quickly to provide that test period, going from first meeting to first grants in about six months. Had President Clinton’s AmeriCorps been established as a demonstration, it is unlikely that it would have been able to scale up even to the 50,000-member level, as Congress became controlled by Republicans in the second year of his Presidency.

However, the design of the Commission had some negative implications as well as positive ones.

<sup>30</sup> See Waldman, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> Waldman, pp. 88-89.

First, decision making by committee can be time consuming and may result in programming that is inconsistent with the hopes of policymakers. The National and Community Service Commission benefited from a high level of involvement by several individuals who were connected to policymakers, but could have easily veered in different directions.

Second, when forced to justify its programs to Congress in order to secure each year's appropriation, the Commission had to view its work through a more powerful political lens than traditional commissions engaged solely in making policy recommendations. As a result, the Commission worked hard to ensure that the states of key senators—Georgia, Maryland, and Massachusetts—submitted applications.

Third, not all programs were successful. Had problems occurred with the more visible grants, the entire experiment might have been deemed a failure. In addition, the pressure to produce evaluation data quickly meant that some of the projects being evaluated were in their inaugural year—a time when bugs were being ironed out and systems built. More mature programs might have produced even stronger results.

Finally, because the President was required to appoint and the Senate to confirm the Commission members, delays were built into the process, resulting in the loss of the first year of appropriations for the Commission.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR BOOMER SERVICE

The question of service by older Americans was largely left out of the work of the Commission on National and Community Service, in part because of the desire of senior service advocates in the late 1980s and early 1990s to keep the focus on existing programs for older volunteers—Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and Senior Companions. But now, as the baby boom generation moves toward traditional retirement age, the timing seems exactly right for a serious and systematic consideration of the ways in which older adults can contribute through service and volunteering. The Commission approach could provide significant

benefits to the field of older adult service, just as the Commission on National and Community Service did for youth service.

As we learned in the youth service arena, it is much easier for the President and Congress, Republicans and Democrats, to agree on a commission than to go straight to launching a major new program. While the political viability of this course of action is appealing, the benefits of the commission approach go far beyond expedience. The Commission approach allows for time to learn, spark innovations, create or adapt systems, develop leadership, and build support. A quick survey of these benefits shows how a commission could advance the possibilities for service by older Americans.

**The timing seems exactly right for a serious and systematic consideration of the ways in which older adults can contribute through service and volunteering.**

### Learning

The first baby boomers are just now reaching retirement age. We don't and can't fully know the types of service and volunteer opportunities that will capture their imagination and energy. A commission could help to surface and resolve key issues, test new ideas, and evaluate new approaches.

### Innovation

The government itself is not likely to be the best innovator in developing new ways to engage older Americans in service and volunteering opportunities. The necessary innovations are much more likely to come from the private and nonprofit sectors. Given the size of the boomer generation and the needs in the nonprofit sector, it is hard to imagine that new groups wouldn't form and existing organizations wouldn't move to capture the talent and energy of older Americans. A commission could spur innovations by showing the government's interest and willingness to invest in new ideas, regardless of their origin.

### **Systems**

To bring any program or investment to scale requires solid systems. A commission could explore the best systems for investing in and supporting high quality programs. Once those systems are established, they can be scaled to meet the size of the opportunity and the market response.

### **Leadership**

Successful development of an expanded field of service and volunteering by older Americans will need new and active leadership. A commission could call for that leadership and provide an outlet and forum for new leaders to try their ideas and to influence government response.

### **Support**

Any new endeavor, public or private, depends on influential supporters. In its very creation, the Commission on National and Community Service created bipartisan support; in its execution it forged a cadre of high-profile and highly-committed supporters; and in its report (“What You Can Do For Your Country”) it called for and made possible support from a wide range of leading political actors. A commission on service and volunteering by the baby boom generation could do just the same.

## **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

Finally, it is important to learn from the way the Commission on National and Community Service worked. It seems clear that the following elements are essential to making any commission successful:

### **Independence**

A commission that is controlled—or perceived to be controlled—by any government agency or political leader loses some of its legitimacy in the policy arena. Although President George H. W. Bush appointed the members of the Commission on National and Community Service, their ability to elect their own officers and appoint their own staff limited Presidential control over their work.

### **Governance by a bipartisan board**

Policy commissions that include members of both major political parties have more credibility than those that are perceived to be “stacked” with individuals sharing a single viewpoint.

### **Knowledgeable staff**

While the Commissioners included many with substantial knowledge about service, the organization could not have operated without a core of experienced staff able to manage necessarily labor-intensive processes.

### **A mandate to make recommendations on key questions**

Although the Commission was not given an explicit mandate to make recommendations in certain areas, the interests of the Congress were made clear through the authorization and appropriations processes. As a result, the Commission’s report addressed many of the key issues facing policymakers. Future Commissions would benefit from explicit direction regarding policy questions to explore.

### **The opportunity to fund demonstration programs**

As noted above, the demonstration programs of the Commission played an important role in informing policy recommendations, expanding the field, testing new models, and building political support for national service. To be effective as a demonstration, grant processes should:

- Fund models that test the implications of key design elements.
- Require participation in an evaluation of the demonstration, which should be conducted by an independent entity funded by the Commission.
- Be designed around clear and, in most cases, measurable objectives for the overall demonstration and for each individual program.
- Support only replicable programs.
- Ensure that program design is consistent enough to make valid comparisons, but flexible enough for innovation and compatibility with local needs and culture.

- Allow a broad-based pool of applicants to compete for funding.
- Encourage the highest possible quality.
- Result in geographically diverse programs.
- Offer sufficient funding as an incentive for participation and to ensure that programs are adequately (but not excessively) funded.

#### **Open processes that allow for input**

Open processes—required by law in most cases—make for transparency and legitimacy. Regional hearings and meetings held outside of Washington, DC, allow for broader participation and fresh perspectives to be considered.

#### **Alignment of Commission and future political concepts**

Engagement of parties—field leadership, Congress, Administration officials, governors, and others—in the work of the Commission helps to build awareness and support for its work, and lays the groundwork for future expansion of the programs if they prove successful. The Commission worked closely with all of these parties (including two Presidents' White House staff and cabinet agencies whose heads were ex-officio members) and attempted to incorporate their interests and priorities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Commission on National and Community Service and the legislative efforts that created it offer useful insights for any future effort to expand service options for older Americans. While some decisions were fortuitous, others well calculated, it is clear that the Commission played an important transition role in moving the youth service field from a nascent movement to a well-funded national effort that enjoys broad-based bipartisan support.

### About the Author

Shirley Sagawa, a founder of the modern service movement in the United States, was instrumental to the drafting and passage of legislation creating the Corporation for National Service. After Senate confirmation as the Corporation's first chief operating and policy officer, she led the development of new service programs for adults and students, including AmeriCorps, and directed strategic planning for this new government corporation.

Sagawa was named a "Woman to Watch in the 21st Century" by *Newsweek* magazine, and one of the "Most Influential Working Mothers in America" by *Working Mother* magazine. Her book, with Eli Segal, *Common Interest, Common Good: Creating Value through Business and Social Sector Partnerships* (Harvard Business School Press) describes how business and social sector organizations can collaborate for mutual gain.

Sagawa is now a partner in Sagawa-Jospin, a firm helping corporations, foundations, individuals, and nonprofits create strategic community partnerships. She is a graduate of Smith College, the London School of Economics, and Harvard Law School.

### About Civic Ventures

Civic Ventures ([www.civicventures.org](http://www.civicventures.org)) is a think tank and incubator, generating ideas and inventing programs to help society achieve the greatest return on experience. Founded in the late 1990s by social entrepreneurs John Gardner and Marc Freedman, Civic Ventures is defining a new stage of life and work between the end of midlife careers and the beginning of true old age—and finding new ways to apply the experience of baby boomers to society's greatest challenges. Civic Ventures runs two major programs, Experience Corps and The Purpose Prize.

### About The UPS Foundation

Founded in 1951 and based in Atlanta, Georgia, The UPS Foundation ([www.community.ups.com](http://www.community.ups.com)) identifies specific areas where its support will clearly impact social issues. The UPS Foundation's major initiatives currently include programs that support increased global volunteerism, literacy, and hunger relief. In 2005, The UPS Foundation donated more than \$43.8 million to charitable organizations worldwide.



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**Boomers and National Service:  
Learning from the Success of Youth Service**

*by Shirley Sagawa*