

STATEMENT OF CONCERN

NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE ARTS

BACKGROUND

Congress acknowledged the important role of the arts in national service programs administered at the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS) when it passed the Serve America Act in 2009. Under the legislation's Education Corps, the placement of skilled artists and musicians in the community is eligible for funding to carry out activities such as *"providing skilled musicians and artists to promote greater community unity through the use of music and arts education and engagement through work in low-income communities, and education, health care, and therapeutic settings, and other work in the public domain with citizens of all ages."* [Sec. 122 (1) (B) (xii)] However, using the arts as a strategy for addressing critical community issues was not included as an area of focus or even referenced in the CNCS four-year strategic plan.

In 2012, due to limits in its budget, CNCS had to turn down more than 80 percent AmeriCorps applications. In addition to the individuals who want to take part, American artists and arts organization are also eager to serve their country by addressing critical needs; yet it is becoming increasingly harder to do so. Recent data reports that 1.6 million people in the United States volunteer for arts and culture organizations, while 7.1 million volunteer artistic services for non-arts/culture groups. Support for the arts through a dedicated Artist Corps—as well as continued inclusion of the arts in all national service programs and national days of service—provides an opportunity for creative skills to be utilized in engaging with communities across the country.

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We support increased visibility of the role of the arts in making communities healthier and more vibrant, as the arts regularly address current CNCS focus areas of Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. We call on CNCS to enact the following:

- Create the Artist Corps as proposed by President Obama during his 2008 campaign and as called for in the Serve America Act, allowing individuals trained in the arts to address community needs through arts-related activities and human capital investments;
- Build bridges between state arts councils and state service commissions enabling these agencies to share information about community artists and residency programs, as well as human service programs receiving arts funding;
- Be more explicit in funding guidelines and program descriptions about the eligibility and opportunities available to community arts programs and nonprofit cultural organizations;
- Provide tools for CNCS grantees to track methods for addressing critical community issues, enabling national service programs to quantify the role of the arts;
- Provide comprehensive webinars and other resources that enable artists and arts organizations to understand how they can lead and participate in national service programs.