

# STATEMENT OF CONCERN NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE ARTS

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## **BACKGROUND**

In 2009, Congress passed the *Serve America Act*, which acknowledged the important role of the arts in national service programs administered at the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS). Under the legislation's newly formed Education Corps, the placement of skilled artists and musicians in the community is eligible for funding. The legislation states that Education Corps may 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 their budget, CNCS had to turn down 80 percent (or almost 500,000) 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/cultural groups. Support for the arts through a dedicated Artist Corps—as well as continued inclusion of the arts in all national service programs—provides an opportunity for creative skills to be utilized in engaging with communities across the country.

## **STATEMENT OF CONCERN**

We support the creation of an Artist Corps as proposed by President Obama during his 2008 campaign, similar to the Education Corps, Healthy Futures Corps, Clean Energy Corps, Veterans Corps, and Opportunity Corps as called for in the *Serve America Act*. An Artist Corps would support programs administered by, or partnered with, nonprofit community organizations that place skilled artists in the community to address current CNCS focus areas of Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. Establishing an Artist Corps would allow individuals trained in the arts to address community needs through arts-related activities and human capital investments. For example, Artist Corps would place artists in programs using the arts to engage youth in high-risk environments; strengthen civic engagement and community development; increase awareness of the natural environment; enhance the lives of individuals with mental and physical disabilities, seniors, and veterans; and develop cross-cultural understanding. State arts councils could provide guidance to state service commissions, sharing information about community artists and residency programs as well as human service programs receiving arts funding.

We also call on CNCS to be more inclusive of community arts projects and nonprofit cultural organizations eligible for national service programs, such as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and National Days of Service, in the funding guidelines and in the tracking of funded programs.

### **Examples of Arts Programs Previously Funded by CNCS**

**Music National Service** is a nonprofit organization that uses music as a strategy for public good. MusicianCorps, its flagship program, trains and places musicians to serve as full-time teachers and mentors in low-performing public schools, youth centers, and other high-need community settings. MusicianCorps uses music to re-engage youth in their academic and civic lives and provide them the skills critical to success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Community Art Corps, Maryland Institute College of Art** matches talented, committed community artists with nonprofits, schools, and community centers throughout Baltimore City. These artists devote a year of service to expanding arts-based afterschool programs for K–12 students.

**Service For Peace** implemented a unique Story of Service component in 50 programs, collecting the oral histories of military veterans and allowing them to share their personal stories of service while highlighting how the stories exemplify Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of peace