

## Should the United States Establish a National Youth Service Corps?

"National service is an alternative to the 'something for nothing' and 'every man for himself' thinking. Linking student aid to service stresses both obligation and rights of citizenship."

### The Issue in Question

The words above were spoken recently by Stephen Moskos, the designer of an imaginative national program to engage young Americans in service to their country. If enacted, sponsors believe, the program will swell the ranks of the military with highly-motivated recruits and bring hundreds of thousands of talented, well-trained young people to help solve the nation's social problems.

Congress began considering the plan in 1989. The plan's spirit recalls the inspiring line delivered by President John F. Kennedy in his inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country!"

**Not a New Idea** The idea of young people lending a hand through public service boasts a long history in the United States. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the federal government organized the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to hire young men who were facing hard times at home. Unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25 worked in conservation camps planting trees, grooming public lands, and putting out fires. In return, they received room, board, and medical care plus a \$30 monthly cash allowance.

Thirty years later, during the 1960s, many young men and women joined the Peace Corps as volunteers eager to improve the lives of people who lived in developing countries. Many other Americans enlisted in VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) to work within low-income communities in the United States. Both programs continue to operate.

Today some cities and states manage youth

service organizations modeled after the CCC and VISTA. The largest such program is the California Conservation Corps, which has put more than 40,000 young California residents to work on conservation projects since its creation in 1976.

### Background on the Case

The proposed Citizens Corps has received the strong endorsement of Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia, a leading Democrat. It is the most popular of a number of national service programs that have been proposed to Congress.

According to the plan, Americans could volunteer for two years of either military or civilian service. Military service involves joining any branch of the military. Civilian service might include working in day-care centers, homeless shelters, or with senior citizens. The proposed corps is open to anyone with a high school diploma or equivalency certificate.

Members of the Citizen Corps would be paid \$100 per week. They would also receive vouchers worth \$10,000 for each year of civilian service or \$12,000 for each year of military service. The vouchers would not be redeemable as cash, but could be used toward college, vocational training, or as a down payment on a house.

As introduced in Congress, the proposal also calls for dropping current federal aid programs that have traditionally benefited college students. Young people would be required to serve in the Citizen Corps before they could qualify for federal assistance to college students. Federal college-assistance programs would be phased out over a 5-year period.

**Benefits Are Many** Supporters of the program, which might attract as many as one million young Americans, say its benefits are many. One effect of the program would be a dramatic rekindling of community spirit,

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## **Should the United States Establish a National Youth Service Corps?** (continued)

which has cooled in recent years, proponents say. They point to recent surveys of high school seniors that have noted a rise in materialism and an accompanying decline in the sense of civic purpose. One such study of the "life goals" of high school seniors found that between 1976 and 1986 the goal that increased the most in importance was "having lots of money."

Backers also contend that the program will offer a pool of well-trained young people ready and able to contribute their energy to any of a number of social improvement projects. Examples often cited for their lack of sufficient attention are educational tutoring programs, hospital and home health care, child care, and environmental projects.

In addition to assisting social programs, the Citizen Corps would almost certainly help the military meet its enlistment goals. Traditionally, the military has used economic incentives to draw recruits, who come primarily from low-income backgrounds. Those calling for adoption of the Corps believe that it would draw young people from all economic levels and ease the shortage of military recruits.

**Criticism of the Plan** The proposed Citizen Corps has drawn criticism as well as praise, however. Opponents claim it is unfair and will

never work. They point out that the program would create a modern-day version of the colonial indentured servant—men and women who traded a free trip to the American colonies for a period of labor in the New World.

Critics also maintain that the Citizen Corps will attract mainly low-income people in need of funds for a college education. Upper-income students will still be able to pay for their college educations, making them much less likely to join the Corps.

Opponents of the program argue that the program will prove complex, unworkable, and expensive. They ask how decisions will be made regarding which community service project will receive workers, and express fear that programs lacking Citizen Corps assistance will be seriously hurt. Critics suggest that the program will either prove to be much more costly than imagined or cover far fewer workers than its designers plan.

Finally, critics maintain that patriotism and public service cannot be legislated. They argue that the proposal puts an unfair burden on the young, especially the poor in need of money for college. They point out that the nation's social needs can be met through new or existing federal programs without the need to create a new agency.

**Should the United States Establish a National Youth Service Corps?** (continued)

**Arguments For Creating the Citizen Corps**

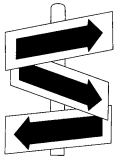
1. It will help promote greater civic responsibility and a deeper sense of purpose among young Americans.
2. It will provide workers for community service programs and supply well-qualified recruits to the military.
3. It will give people a means to afford college through its credit vouchers.

**Arguments Against Creating the Citizen Corps**

1. It will attract mostly low-income young people while having little impact among middle- and upper-class youth.
2. With the elimination of federal aid to college students, poor students will be forced to participate in order to afford college.
3. The Corps will prove unworkable and inefficient, with little benefit for the programs it was designed to help.

**The Decision-Making Checklist**

✓	<b>Clarify the problem.</b> (What is the issue or conflict?)
✓	<b>Create a list of possible solutions.</b> (How might you resolve the problem?)
✓	<b>Compare the pros and cons of each solution.</b> (What are the strengths and weaknesses of each solution?)
✓	<b>Consider your values and goals.</b> (What is important to you in choosing a course of action, and why?)
✓	<b>Choose a course of action and evaluate the results.</b> (What would you decide, and how would you judge the outcome?)



**UNIT 2**  
**Worksheet**

# ***Should the United States Establish a National Youth Service Corps?***

**Objective** Answer the following questions based on your understanding of the issues in this case. Use an additional sheet of paper when necessary.

### **A. Comprehension**

1. Identify four youth service programs in existence before 1980.

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2. What will young people receive in return for service in the Citizen Corps?

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3. How will the proposed Corps affect current programs of federal aid to college students?

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### **B. Critical Thinking**

1. **Identifying Central Issues** In your opinion, what obligations do young people have to their nation in times of peace? Be specific in your answer.

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2. **Predicting Consequences** Assume that the Citizen Corps were approved and launched in the United States. What effects might the new program have on military recruitment? On social agency hiring? On the mix of people attending college? Discuss your answers as a class.

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3. **Demonstrating Reasoned Judgment** If the Citizen Corps were approved, would you join the program or not? Why would you take that position? Use the Arguments For, the Arguments Against, and the Decision-Making Checklist in *Should the United States Establish a National Youth Service Corps?* to help you make your decision and develop your answer. Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper.