

# Service

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**POINTS  
OF LIGHT**

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# Civic Life Today

At Points of Light, we believe that the most powerful force of change in our world is the individual — one who makes a positive difference. The value of individual actions, no matter how small, can have an impact and change a life. Together, our collective actions are a force that transforms the world.

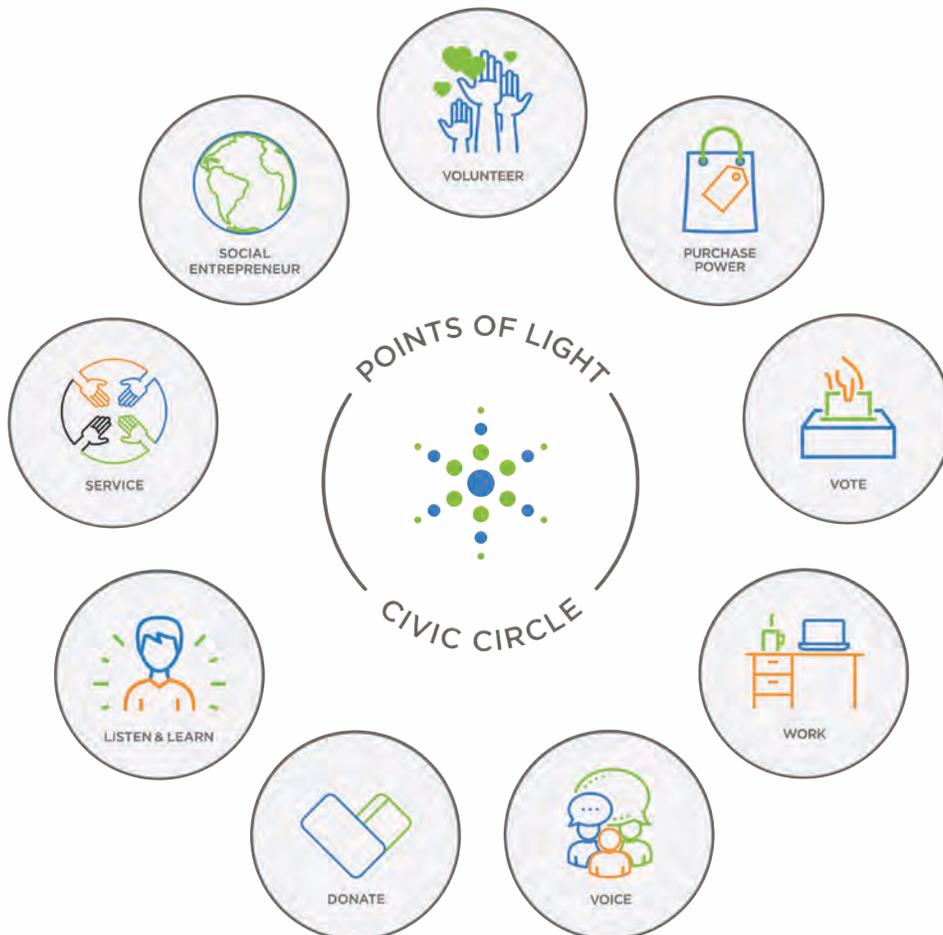
We live in extraordinary times. The 21st century has already seen sweeping change led by the power of people. The advancement of technology accelerates our experiences. Yet, the challenges facing our world are great and complex:

- Inequality rooted in systemic racism is front and center, and the demand for social justice is strong.
- A global pandemic exposed a variety of system weaknesses triggering public health and economic crises.
- Climate change remains the highest concern of Generation Z.
- Global conflict, instability, poverty, and lack of opportunity has created the largest migration crisis in human history.
- New and old systems are being built, dismantled and rebuilt in real time, often creating instability.

We are witnessing a significant shift in our civic culture, a revolution against apathy, marked by events and movements that have altered the way we connect with and engage in our communities and our world. But what does this connection and engagement look like?

When we think about civic life today, we know that people want to live an integrated life that reflects their values. People who “do good” or want to “create change” don’t necessarily assign themselves traditional labels like “volunteer” anymore.

Today’s engaged person may express their desire to do good through the purchases they make, what they share on social media, where and how they choose to work and what nonprofit organization to support as a donor, or of course, a volunteer. Doing good comes in many forms. We believe we are at the dawn of a new era that we are calling the Civic Century, an age when people become the driving force that transforms our world. When future generations look back on this time, they will see an era of sustained, meaningful civic engagement, fueled by a global community of people ready and willing to do good.



# What Is Service and Why Does It Matter?

A local mayor, a mail carrier and a firefighter – the duties the people in these roles carry out could not seem more different. But for all of their differences they have one thing in common – they are all people in service.

When we think of the word “service,” the concept of “volunteering” may come to mind. But if we are to distinguish between the two terms, while there may be “acts of service” when we volunteer, service itself represents the broader institutions and roles intended for the public good. From the wastewater treatment plant operator who ensures that the community has clean drinking water to the school board member who advocates for student rights, those who participate in service are committing their time, energy and talent to support members of their community and contribute to the greater good, whether that be through national service, military service or public service.

The makeup and structure of service roles can be as varied as the roles themselves. They can be compulsory, such as with serving on a jury or voluntary such as the case with volunteer firefighters. They can be a short-term opportunity, such as serving on a planning committee for local initiative. Or they can represent someone’s career. Some roles even require you to be elected to the position, such as with government officials.

Service plays a key role in ensuring communities thrive. Public institutions such as courthouses, libraries, many universities and yes,

even the Department of Motor Vehicles play a key role in functional democracies. Public services seek to extend opportunities, protect the vulnerable and improve quality of life. When service benefits one person, it doesn’t (or shouldn’t) take away from someone else.

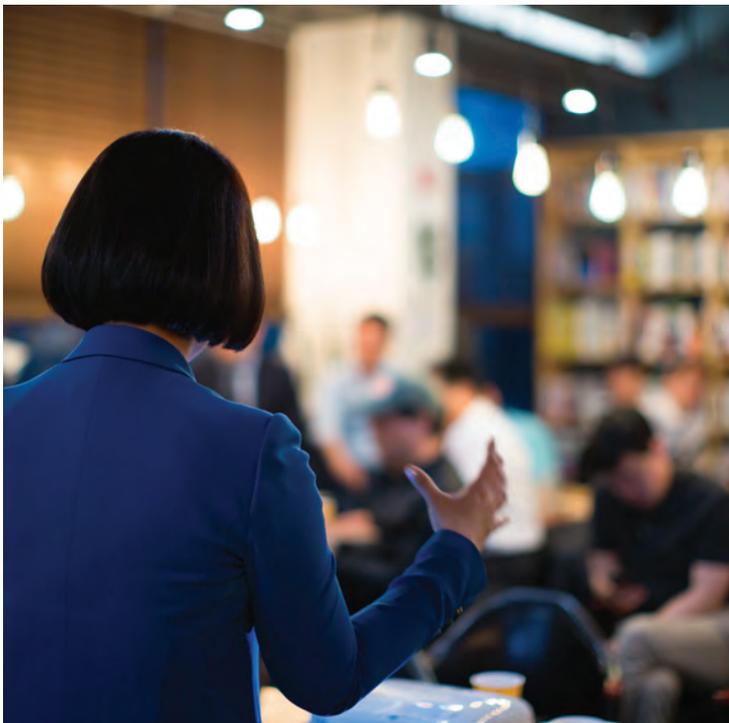
And participation in service is also an investment we can make in ourselves. Many opportunities can lead to greater professional and skill development through the opportunity to take on new experiences and challenges. They can also help us become more informed, engaged citizens.

However, appreciation and respect for those in public service is low in many countries around the world. In the U.S., a recent poll found that only 17% of respondents indicated that they trusted the federal government “to do the right thing.”<sup>1</sup>

While we can argue about the intentions and motives of specific individuals in public service, such as politicians we don’t agree with, we can still support and steward public servants to work for the benefit of society.

Imagine a world without emergency response agencies that lead recovery efforts in natural disasters. Imagine a world without judiciary systems that hold people accountable and seek justice for victims and families.

Those in service are essential to economic development and prosperity, and there’s a role we can all play in contributing to the greater public good.



## The Privilege of Service

Service roles often come with a commitment and may even require additional resources such as funding for a political campaign or to subsidize a low-income opportunity. For example, if a single mom has a young child to raise by herself, it might be out of reach for her to live off of a national service stipend for 10 months. These financial sacrifices are not ones many people can make and they speak to the resources that some do have to take on such roles.

The influence of resources can often be seen in international service opportunities with those from “developed countries” working in “developing countries”, and can be characterized by a lack of diversity. For example, as of 2019, only 34% of Peace Corps volunteers were BIPOC.<sup>3</sup> This lack of diversity can lead to issues of “white saviorism” — when white people provide support to historically excluded groups or communities in a self-serving manner. White saviors’ service is centered on their own journey, and they have the mindset that they’re rescuing the community from itself.<sup>4</sup> Further still, even when opportunities are given to those from the global south, they often require the ability to read and write in English which can limit accessibility to those from wealthier families.

## The Many Forms Service Can Take



## Taking a Deeper Dive

From an AmeriCorps member in rural Kansas focusing on education issues to a government official addressing resettlement issues for refugees in France, the concept of service is multifaceted, taking on countless shapes and forms.<sup>2</sup> But regardless of the type of role, there's no doubt that participation in public service represents a demonstration of passion and commitment to one's community and country.

Because service is rooted in the public good, those in positions of service have unique power and influence. Exercising that power in ways that are experienced as inconsistent, unjust or morally wrong undermines the intent and impact of service across many institutions. Ethics play a key role in service, from an elected official who refuses to support legislation that would harm some communities while benefiting others, or a police officer whose use of force is consistent whether the perpetrator is a white or BIPOC individual. A lack of just, transparent and consistent behavior only fuels mistrust.

In this issue of Civic Life Today, we'll explore how roles in service can be a pipeline to a successful career, how such roles can continue to inspire long after we leave them and how we can all participate in or support those in service.



## ***Everybody Can Be Great, Because Anybody Can Serve***

“Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve... You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.”

***- Martin Luther King Jr.***

Enlisting in the military, running for office or living in another country for 18 months with Atlas Corps isn’t for everybody. Not everyone can or might want to make such a long-term commitment to service. But as Martin Luther King Jr. said in one of his final speeches before his death, “everybody can be great, because anybody can serve.”

Whether it’s serving on a jury to help bring about a just resolution on a case or joining a local committee to address an issue impacting your community, there’s a place for everyone in service. These part-time, short-term or even one-time acts not only bring value and contribute to supporting the community, but they also allow you to actively be a better citizen. It’s all about being invested in the topic at hand and approaching it with your heart set on bettering society for all.

Further still, when opportunities to serve aren’t present, we can bring about more awareness and understanding of service by recognizing and listening to the stories of those who have served.

Chances are we all know someone who has taken on a service role in their lives. Maybe a friend joined the Peace Corps after graduating college or maybe your uncle served in the Army when he was younger. But have you ever asked them about these experiences? The good that they experienced and the challenges that they faced? What they learned about working with a community they were guests in?

The experiences of those in service roles are unique to the individuals themselves. There’s a great deal we can learn about how we work with communities and you may even be inspired by someone’s story and find a path to service for yourself.



# *A Reflection on Service by Asma Ahmed*



My AmeriCorps service year has been a huge part of my development both professionally and personally. The act of service is an integral part of the community I was raised in. My family and I immigrated to the United States at a young age and settled in the Pacific Northwest where we were met with a community of people who shared our background. We were immediately drawn to each other and supported one another through the difficulties of building a life in a new country. The kindness and service of others has been lifechanging for me and my family and because of that, the importance of service was instilled in me early on.

When I became a barista at Starbucks, I wanted to play a bigger role in the community I worked in. This meant doing my own research to learn about the needs in my community and how I could get involved. I found an organization near my store and was able to host a diaper drive in support of them. This was a great way for me and my fellow baristas to become engaged in community service. This experience made me curious about other ways I could lend my hand. After some digging, I learned of a program through Starbucks called The Starbucks Foundation Service Fellows (a program developed in partnership with Points of Light). I joined enthusiastically and was placed at an organization called United Way of King County, not knowing what this organization would have in store for me.

During the seven months of this fellowship, I worked with the Volunteer Engagement Team where I supported Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, built relationships with community-based organizations and was able to try my hand at a small amount of grantmaking. It was so exciting to engage with community in this way and to gain new skills while doing so. I didn't want this time to end so I investigated ways I could continue to support this organization. I learned of a program called AmeriCorps VISTA or Volunteers in Service to America, in which an individual works a full time, one-year term at an organization to help build their capacity. This was just what I wanted. I was excited about the possibility of doing this work for an entire year. Shortly after my fellowship ended, I began my AmeriCorps term working on an early learning program called ParentChild+.

I worked with a brilliant team in the education department where I learned that achieving education equity started at an early age and that we needed to be strategic about how we made sure that children who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have equal possibilities in the American school system from the start by providing culturally relevant educational support through this program. This was a huge turning point for me as I realized that a program like this

could have been so helpful to me as a child. I learned that the number of BIPOC children who are not kindergarten ready was disproportionately higher compared to their white peers and I felt a connection with that experience. Throughout the year, I was encouraged to provide input on decisions made about the program and to continue my learning and participation in other areas of the organization, as well. I was a sponge during my term of service and learned, more intimately, about the needs of the community and how to think strategically to address the inequities that affected BIPOC communities, which included my own.

While I gained so much from my year of service, it was not without challenges. AmeriCorps has historically been a program that pays a living stipend under the federal poverty line. It was a challenge to support anti-poverty work while making such a low monthly stipend. I can imagine that for other BIPOC AmeriCorps members, who similarly may not have the generational wealth that others have to support them through the program, it was a challenge too. For the program to encourage more BIPOC individuals to apply and serve, I think it's imperative that AmeriCorps members are paid a livable wage and that we acknowledge the important lived experience of BIPOC members who are uniquely positioned to respond to the tragedy of poverty that disproportionately impacts BIPOC communities.

My time as an AmeriCorps has come to an end, but I'm excited to take the skills I learned and transition them into my new position as a volunteer engagement manager at the same organization I served with, United Way of King County. I know my AmeriCorps service year was a huge part of the reason I got this opportunity and I'm so thankful. My commitment to service has taken me in many directions but it culminated in committing a year of my life to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA. It was truly a life changing year.



## How Did Service Influence Your Life?



*Entering any military branch is a true call to service. And as a veteran, I have answered the call for over 30 years, during which I have discovered purpose, direction and the meaning of selflessness. A sense of pride overwhelms me as I continue to serve my country and community.*

**Chief Marc Willis, USN, Retired**  
U.S Navy / Various Locations (1988-2010)

*The best way I can describe my service time is to think about it as a spontaneous road trip – you’re guaranteed to have an adventure, and the shared experiences turn into stories and memories worth a lifetime. During the time spent serving, I learned things I could not have elsewhere: passion, work ethics and deep commitment to the mission and work of the organization, despite difficult times, with limited support and few resources.*

**Ramona Dragomir**  
European Solidarity Corps (2011) / Atlas Corps (2013-2014)  
Slovakia & Washington, D.C.



*Service has instilled in me a sense of community and solidarity. My time as a Peace Corps volunteer has extended my appreciation for working with others toward a goal of mutual understanding, empowerment and collaboration. Service should be a selfless trait and characteristic to which many should aspire.*

**Keva Luke**  
Peace Corps / Colombia (2017-2019)



*Through service, I have become more reflective and introspective. I am grateful for what I have and for what I can share with others. I have been enlightened by the kind, lovely, accomplished individuals I have met. I am hopeful that more individuals will be of service to others.*

**Jackee Canino**  
AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP (2011) / Tarrytown, NY (2017-2021)





*Military service provided a lifetime of lessons, but the greatest was the knowledge that working together, no challenge is insurmountable. The belief that people standing together, with different experiences and different voices, can come together and sacrifice to meet a common goal based on a single cohesive vision, reminds me daily that anything is possible.*

**Michelle Dee**  
U.S Army / Ft. Bragg, NC (1989-1993)

*My AmeriCorps service inspired a lifelong commitment to creating a world where everyone can thrive. The AmeriCorps spirit of "getting things done" still motivates me after a decade with nonprofits. A more just, equitable world is possible when we work hand in hand with diverse communities to build it.*

**Maria Caruso**  
AmeriCorps / Atlanta, GA (2011-2013)



*Leaving Brazil to serve in a nonprofit organization in the US was one of the most life-changing experiences for me. Being out of my comfort zone allowed me to learn and apply new skills to my work and ultimately better prepared me to advance causes that I care about. More than this, my service experience provided me a unique opportunity to see firsthand the variety in culture, people and backgrounds in this country that I would never have known about otherwise.*

**Jonathas Barreto**  
Atlas Corps / Atlanta, GA (2012-2014)



*Serving in Tanzania was one of the best experiences of my life. It taught me to value different perspectives; to not assume one way of doing something is the only way of doing it. It helped me to reflect deeply on my own beloved country, to question the status quo and open myself up to new, different ideas and ways of doing and thinking.*

**Elizabeth Pass**  
Peace Corps / Masasi, Tanzania (1997-1999)



*Representation Matters:*

# ***An Interview With Nicole Cannizzaro***

*Nicole Cannizzaro was first elected to the Nevada State Senate in 2016. In 2019, Nicole became the first woman elected to the position of Majority Leader of the State Senate in Nevada's history.*

*She earned a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Nevada, Reno and, following college, she earned her law degree from the UNLV Boyd School of Law. Upon graduation, Nicole began her legal career in private practice with a focus on civil litigation. Nicole ultimately decided to pursue public service, and she joined the Clark County District Attorney's Office in 2011. Currently, Nicole works as a Chief Deputy District Attorney in the gang unit.*



### **What inspired you to run for office and be a public servant?**

When I was in elementary school, my mom used to work at a lunch cafe in downtown Las Vegas and, from time to time, my dad would have to pick me up from school and drop me off at her workplace until she finished the shift. The cafe was about a block away from the courthouse downtown. Naturally, the seats were filled with lawyers having lunch with colleagues. I saw them and thought lawyers seemed so cool, wearing suits, carrying briefcases and discussing important topics. From an early age, I told my mom I wanted to be a lawyer. That was a lofty goal in my family, but my mom told me if I worked hard and went to school, I could be a lawyer.

As someone who benefitted from the community around me, I found myself engaged by the very issues that were so instrumental to my own experience; things like giving students a quality education, ensuring good paying jobs exist here and supporting working families. I became interested in how those decisions were being made at the state level, and eventually, decided to run for legislative office in hopes of working on those issues. If I wanted to make sure our state was investing in the same kinds of opportunities that afforded me the ability to succeed, then my voice needed to be at the table. What inspired me to run was my own experience and all of the support this community provided to me. The chance to serve in the legislature allows me to support my community and ensure Nevada is still the kind of place where opportunities are possible.

### **Politics can be polarizing for people. Why do you think public service is an important way to be civically engaged?**

Politics can be a difficult space to feel comfortable because there can be so much disagreement and polarization. But, so many decisions that affect our everyday lives are made in the political and legislative space, and getting engaged in public service is one of the ways to ensure important voices and positions are part of those decisions. It can be easy to walk away from engaging in public service, but I would offer that without opposite viewpoints, we would be homogeneous in how we approach solutions to everyday issues. I believe there is a healthy space where we can disagree, yet still hear each other out and come up with solutions that consider and address those differing viewpoints.

**You've been a part of a number of significant firsts. You're the first female majority leader in Nevada and the state is the first in the United States to have a majority-female legislature. Why is representation so important?**

Being part of the first female majority legislature is not only exciting from a historical context, but also because it has allowed for voices that have traditionally been unrepresented in state legislatures to be at the forefront of decision making.

This shift in representation means the voices of those women and their experiences are influencing and impacting policy decisions for the State. When the representation of a body reflects the people in the community, or when a historically excluded population is now part of the majority, those voices are better able to be heard, considered, and are therefore more impactful. As an example, prior to the female majority, there had been numerous attempts to pass an equal pay bill.

Once we had a female majority, the conversation shifted from whether it was worth discussing to how we could implement a law that was balanced and purposeful. The conversation changes when more voices are at the table to share their experiences. I find the more we have diverse representation, the more those points of view can impact the policy decisions being made at the legislature.

### **Being the first can present some challenges. What have been the biggest obstacles you have encountered thus far?**

Just prior to the 2018 elections, I started to get asked what would happen if we ended up with the first female majority legislature, and whether everything would change or if we would be able to continue to get the business of the State done during the legislative session. People were nervous about whether having a majority of women would mean that traditional topics or the essential business of the state would be set by the wayside. Instead, would we only focus on issues deemed to be "women's issues?" I think people were afraid of what and how much would change with a shift in leadership and representation.

### **What advice would you give to someone who is interested in service but doesn't know where to start?**

There are so many opportunities to get involved in public service, not just getting involved in the legislative space, and I would encourage anyone who is interested in public service to start by thinking about the issues they are passionate about. Wherever decisions are being made for the things you care about, that's where you need to be. Don't be afraid to reach out, ask plenty of questions and jump in.

[Read more from our interview with Nicole](#)



*Service Is a Catalyst:*

# ***An Interview With Scott Beale***

*Scott is a lifelong champion for international volunteerism. Currently he is the associate director of the Peace Corps leading the agency's global operations. He is passionate about supporting leaders from diverse backgrounds in the U.S. and around the world. For the past 15-years, Scott founded and led **Atlas Corps**, a leadership development program for the world's best social change professionals.*



### What is Atlas Corps and what inspired you to found it?

Atlas Corps is an international nonprofit with the mission to address critical social issues by developing leaders and strengthening organizations through professional development opportunities that include an overseas exchange as well as online training. Atlas Corps is most known for being a “reverse Peace Corps” that identifies civil society leaders overseas and gives them the opportunity to volunteer in the U.S., but the organization also has a robust online training program as well. Over the past 15 years, 1,100 leaders from 110 countries have joined the Atlas Corps Leaders Community.

I was inspired to found this organization because my own experience as a volunteer in Bosnia taught me the powerful affect service can have on developing one’s professional capacity and leadership skills. And while living in India as a U.S. Diplomat, it occurred to me that more people overseas should have the opportunity that I had to serve abroad. I was struck by how talent is universally distributed in the world, but opportunity is not. I founded Atlas Corps to give the world’s best leaders the opportunity to serve in the U.S. to advance their professional development, while also allowing people in the U.S. to learn from their perspectives and experience.

### During your career, how have you witnessed the impact of service on an individual?

Much of my career has been focused on long-term, overseas service. I have interacted with thousands of people, from all over the world, who have participated in this type of service and it has literally changed the lives of every single participant. It is impossible to volunteer outside of your country for an extended period of time without being impacted by that experience.

**As you’ve noted, we know programs like Peace Corps and Atlas Corps have a profound impact on the people who serve. Tell us more about the importance of service for communities.**

To me, service is the highest form of love for others. In particular, volunteerism is most powerful when done with a humble heart, and an open and informed mind. We live in communities, in a country, in a world with great inequality – not just of resources, but also of opportunity. We live in a world shackled by structural racism and injustice. In different ways we are all a part of it and we are all held back by it. When done right (humble, open), volunteerism is a path to empower others and yourself to overcome some of these challenges. Whether tutoring a child in your community, or in a refugee camp 1,000 miles away, you are expanding opportunities. When addressing climate change in your state, or

servicing overseas on environmental projects, you are making an impact for everyone.

### People in service want to make a positive impact on the communities they work with. How can they best balance this intention while avoiding unintentional harm that can come into play with service?

The greatest community impact of volunteerism is when the programs are well-designed to build the capacity of local communities, in partnership with local communities. We need to be careful to volunteer in ways that are not a form of white saviorism, nor neocolonialism. We must avoid the unintended consequences of creating dependencies through our actions. Much of this responsibility is on the organizers of the volunteer opportunities. From the very beginning the program design must have the input from the community – what help are they seeking, how can it be done in partnership, what must volunteers know to respect local traditions and customs. Too often the volunteer experiences are designed poorly from the start because the local community was engaged too late in the process. At the Peace Corps, each placement begins with the Host Country asking for the support and the sites are designed in partnership with the community.

It would be naïve to say all volunteerism is positive for all communities all of the time. But I truly believe the ingredients for success are not complicated and volunteers can address critical issues at home and abroad, particularly through long-term service that is done in partnership with communities and in a humble manner to both learn and serve. Service does not need to be perfect for it to be profoundly good, but it does require more than just good intentions.

### What advice would you give to someone interested in a service program but is unsure if they want to make the commitment?

Ask yourself what is holding you back? Is it fear? Is it your parents? Is it insecurity about how you can make a difference? Is it economic instability or some pre-determined definition of what success looks like?

Most of the time, we create excuses for ourselves out of some form of fear. I hope you are able to overcome that fear and embark on a journey that will likely have the greatest impact on your life and those around you. For me, only who I married was a bigger decision – and I met her through volunteering! So, service can be a large commitment and can come with risks, but the rewards are so much greater and long lasting than you can even imagine.

**[Read more from our interview with Scott.](#)**





## ***Inspiring a Lifetime of Service and Civic Engagement***

***“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change we seek.”***

***- Barack Obama***

When people raise their hands for a service opportunity, they do so with a number of motivations in mind but one in particular is often the same – to do good. That being said, many service roles require participants to go into communities that are new to them and different from their own. They may even be in another country on another continent.

Because these roles, like the military or international and national service programs, represent a longer-term commitment and are more immersive, they pave the way for collaborating with local leaders to tackle issues specific to that community. And when those who serve take a step back to listen and learn from members of that community, experience the pressing challenges firsthand and consider the locals’ ideas before making their own, a profound impact on how these individuals think about civic engagement and advancing social causes can take root.

For example, the Singapore Armed Forces provided dental care to civilians in Afghanistan and trained a team of Afghan dentists and dental assistants so they could continue to treat the community.<sup>5</sup> In Guatemala, the Peace Corps volunteers and the local community came together to hold trainings for indigenous women on the importance of self-esteem, family planning and starting and maintaining a garden to prevent malnutrition.<sup>6</sup> These are just a couple of examples of those in service roles learning from and working with the communities they are guests in.

But what happens when these immersive experiences end? Often, they inspire a lifetime of service that is grounded in the belief that something can and should be done for the causes they care about. In fact, 8 out of 10 AmeriCorps alumni report that if they were confronted with a community issue, they could develop a plan to address it and get others to care.<sup>7</sup> These experiences move people off the sidelines to go from inaction to action.

So for anyone looking for a pathway to deeper to civic engagement, service can be a meaningful stepping stone to doing so. And it’s never too late – some programs are even designed specifically with seniors in mind.

# Did You Know?



PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS HAVE WORKED IN 142 COUNTRIES<sup>13</sup>



THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1933 TO GIVE YOUNG AMERICAN MEN EMPLOYMENT DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION<sup>17</sup>



36% OF ELECTED SEATS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARE HELD BY WOMEN WORLDWIDE<sup>20</sup>



CHINA HAS MORE ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY MEMBERS THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY<sup>15</sup>



THE FIRST STANDING (PERMANENT) ARMY IS BELIEVED TO HAVE FORMED AROUND 2250 BCE<sup>18</sup>

**270K**

AROUND THE WORLD, OVER 270,000 AMERICANS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN AMERICORPS<sup>14</sup>

**75**

APPROXIMATELY 75 COUNTRIES GLOBALLY REQUIRE SOME FORM OF MANDATORY SERVICE FOR CITIZENS<sup>16</sup>



NORWAY HAS THE HIGHEST GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT LEVELS IN THE WORLD, REACHING 30% OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT<sup>19</sup>



## Moving Past Distrust to Get to Just

When we think of public service, we can look at it in two ways. There are those who work for a public institution to serve the community, such as librarians and firefighters. And then there are those who are elected to represent the community's citizens at a local, state or federal level. It's impossible to know the motives and reasons why these people go into public service, but all of these roles are ways to demonstrate love for your community and country.

With the polarizing nature of politics today, trust in government is diminishing all around the world. In 18 out of 27 countries included in a recent study, business was more trusted than

ideas and ultimately vote for bills to be signed into laws that affect our everyday life and the issues that matter most to us. And they are entrusted with determining with how resources are distributed. The power and influence is significant, therefore the need for transparency and trust is even greater.

When we acknowledge that public service represents the institutions that can move forward the change we want to see, we must then harness our passion and even our distrust to do something. Instead of thinking about the ways you'd do things differently, you can be the catalyst by stepping into the role of a public



PHOTO: SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH

government, being the only institution seen as both competent and ethical.<sup>11</sup> Younger generations are even less trusting of these institutions. One recent study shows that 46% of young American adults (18-29) are "low trusters" in that they "are more likely to see others as selfish, exploitative and untrustworthy, rather than helpful, fair and trustworthy."<sup>12</sup>

When the relationship between citizens and public servants is crucial to advancing society to one that is fair and beneficial for all, how do you move past the distrust, especially among younger generations, to be more engaged?

We must first start by recognizing that those in public service, especially elected officials, hold a lot of responsibility in our society. They are the ones who work on policy change, propose new

servant yourself. The world is made better when more people from different life experiences and generations participate.

And if running a political campaign isn't in the stars, do your homework on the public servants who are working to solve issues important to you in the ways that align with your values and get behind them, whether that be through a campaign donation or publicly voicing your support.

Service is rarely a solo effort. Participation in service often requires working alongside and within the same systems as others in service roles. They may not share all of your view points. But the most important thing is that we don't ignore something because we don't like it. Being passive doesn't solve problems. It's those that are willing to get uncomfortable and get involved who do.



## ***Building the Foundation for a Successful Career***

What do I want to be when I grow up? It's a question most of us have asked ourselves at one time or another. But how often do we think about service as a pathway to answering this question? Military service, public service and national or international service, can all provide invaluable skills and experiences needed to build a successful career.

While some skills can be attained in the classrooms of a high school, technical or trade school, or a university, there are many more skills that only experience itself can provide. Among them are the communication, problem-solving and management skills synonymous with being effective in service roles. Driven by a sense of purpose and direction, research has shown that those who participate in a service year are twice as likely to pursue further education. And that coupled with in-demand skills including research and leadership has allowed many service year alumni to begin their careers in higher-paying roles than their peers who didn't serve.<sup>8</sup>

With respect to the military, a study found that U.S. veterans on average earned more in their

post-military careers than those who went straight to job training or college right after high school. While the average American salary for those who never served in the military was just over \$54,000 in 2019, veterans averaged higher at \$65,700.<sup>9</sup>

Whether it's the technical skill of installing solar panels to provide electricity to a rural village or the soft skill of performing well under pressure while fighting insurgents, the ways in which these skills are transferable to the workplace are endless. Skills that can equip an AmeriCorps alum to go into community development work or enable a military veteran to become a security analyst. One study found that 60% of AmeriCorps alumni are opting to work with a nonprofit organization or other public agency after their term of service.<sup>10</sup>

When college doesn't seem like the right next step or the path you should take in your career isn't clear, service opportunities become a great way to develop new skills while also expanding your world view.



# What Does That Mean?

## Civil Servant<sup>21</sup>

a person employed by the government to work for the public sector

## Gap Year<sup>22</sup>

a period, typically an academic year, taken by a student as a break between secondary school and higher education

## Loan Forgiveness<sup>23</sup>

a release from having to repay federal student loans – in full or in part – that have been borrowed to pay for a postsecondary education

## National Service<sup>24</sup>

a nationwide program of public/community work in which citizens, mostly young people, serve for one or two years at a subminimum wage to help the community as well as themselves. This includes serving in the military or participating in a national service program such as Peace Corps

## Private Sector<sup>25</sup>

the part of an economy that is not controlled or owned by the government

## Public Good<sup>26</sup>

a commodity or service that is provided without profit to all members of a society, either by the government or a private individual or organization

## Public Sector<sup>27</sup>

the part of an economy that is controlled or owned by the government

## Public Servant<sup>28</sup>

An elected or appointed member of the government for social or public services

## Service Learning<sup>29</sup>

an educational approach where a student learns theories in the classroom and at the same time volunteers with an agency, usually a non-profit or social service group, and engages in reflection activities to deepen their understanding of what is being taught

## Service Year<sup>30</sup>

a year-long experience in which participants immerse themselves in communities through service programs such as AmeriCorps, WorldTeach, Habitat for Humanity, etc. to address and help solve community issues including education, the environment, healthcare, disaster relief and more

# Learning Library

## Tools and Resources:



Americorps



Peace Corps



Atlas Corps



Youth Build



Senior Corps



She Should Run



New American Fellows



New Politics

## Learn More:

[Get Into Government: An Insider's Tips for Breaking In \(The Muse\)](#)

[Public Service Careers](#)

[Eight Skills Military Members Bring to the Workplace](#)

[The pandemic reminds us of the importance of public service](#)

[Why Public Service? \(Podcast\)](#)

[Campaign Training for People with Disabilities \(National Council on Independent Living\)](#)

[Military Size by Country \(World Population Review\)](#)

[Mandatory Service Around the Globe \(Medium\)](#)

[The History of the Civilian Conservation Corps \(History Channel\)](#)

[The Future of Service \(National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service\)](#)

[How Other Countries Do National Service \(The World\)](#)

## What to Watch:

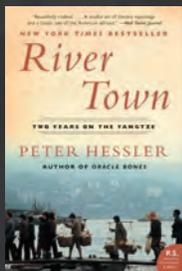
[A Towering Task \(Documentary\)](#)

[The Necessity for Servant Leadership \(TEDx Talk\)](#)

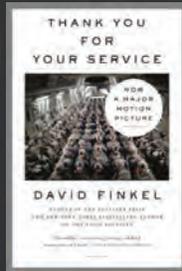
[21 of the Best Military Movies \(My Base Guide\)](#)

[Burn \(Documentary\)](#)

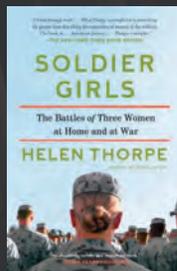
## The Book Nook:



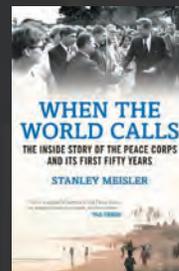
River Town  
Peter Hessler



Thank You For  
Your Service  
David Finkel



Soldier Girls  
Helen Thorpe



When The World Calls  
Stanley Meisler



# Youth and Family Corner

Adults can show young people how they can commit their time, energy and talent to public, national or military service in various, enriching ways. As early as elementary school, students may begin to run for student council president or join a civic club. Many American school districts observe Veterans Day to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good. With the introduction of these activities, young people begin to understand what it means to serve.

**Here are some ways to help young people better understand the concept of service:**

**A path to future military service.** Many young people know about the various military branches and may even have a goal of serving in one. However, they may not know that there are opportunities to begin preparing to serve while they're still in school. Established in 1916, the U.S. Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program currently operates in more than 1,700 public and private high schools, military institutions, and correctional centers throughout the United States and around the world.

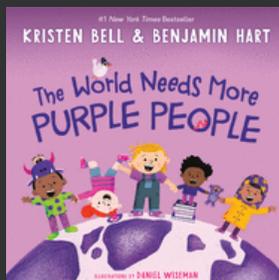
**Serving their community – a path to serving their country.** Through their school student council, National Honor Society or other national leadership organizations, or civic or faith-based organizations, youth can serve in leadership roles providing their time and talent to support their community. This doesn't have to always mean running for president! Serving as a member to help prepare for events, fundraise or share important information related to causes they care about can all be service. These opportunities can prepare them for future roles in service such as Peace Corps or AmeriCorps.

**Supporting those who serve.** While direct service isn't for everyone, young people can support those who are sharing their time and skills. Here are a few Daily Point of Light honorees doing just that:

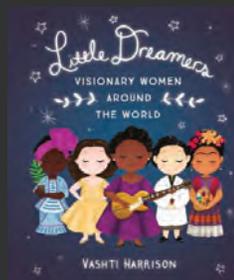
- **Derek Fletcher** started the **Washing Window For Warriors** program in Boca Raton, Florida by partnering with **Hope for the Warriors**, a nonprofit that meets the changing needs of service members and their families. Derek and his friends raise money by washing windows with a goal of reaching \$10,000 to donate to causes supporting veterans.
- **Jake Gallin** was inspired to support military families after being moved by a television show where a mother talked about her son who died at the age of 20 while fighting in Iraq in 2005. He started **Stars for Cars** in 2011, a program that sells star-shaped magnetic decals online. Its mission is to raise awareness and for civilians to show their support of military families.
- Young people don't always have to start their own organization in order to serve. Sometimes **writing nice notes** to those that are serving can go a long way.

## Family Friendly Books & Resources

The following are resources for families to encourage listening and learning from others as well as information on finding other resources you can trust:



The World Needs More  
Purple People  
Kristen Bell &  
Benjamin Hart



Little Dreamers  
Vashti Harrison



Susie B. Won't  
Back Down  
Margaret Finnegan



Sgt. Stubby:  
An American Hero



Valiant



## ***Continue the Conversation***

How do your friends, family and colleagues participate in or think about service? Share what you've learned and explore the ways in which you and others can leverage your time and talents in the workplace to support what matters most to you. Here are some discussion questions to get started:

Have you ever considered a career in public service or even a short-term commitment such as joining the military or the Peace Corps? Why or why not?

What are some of the sacrifices those in public service and those around them like family and friends make? What are some ways to recognize and thank them for their work?

If you have personal experience with public service, how do you share your story with others?

Have there been times you were participating in public service and didn't even realize it?

# Civic Life Journey: Personal Action Plan

Do you want to leverage your time and talent at work to support what matters most to you? Use this worksheet to develop your own Personal Action Plan! By going through each question, you'll discover opportunities that match your interests and values, and identify up to three action steps. Families are also encouraged to do this exercise together.

## What are the issues that you are most passionate about?

Circle the 3 issue areas that most interest you.

- Adult or Youth Education
- Animal Welfare
- Arts & Culture
- Civil & Human Rights
- Disaster Response
- Environment/Climate Change
- Fair Wages & Labor Practices
- Health & Wellness
- Homelessness & Housing
- Human Trafficking

- Philanthropic or Social Mission
- Hunger
- Immigrant or Refugee Services
- LGBTQ+ Rights
- Racial & Social Justice
- Senior Services
- Veterans
- Women & Girls
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## How would you like to see these issues improved in your own community or globally?

Blank space for writing responses to the question: How would you like to see these issues improved in your own community or globally?

## What could be potential barriers to making these improvements? Do you understand the root causes of these barriers and, if not, how can you learn more about them?

Blank space for writing responses to the question: What could be potential barriers to making these improvements? Do you understand the root causes of these barriers and, if not, how can you learn more about them?

**Discovery: Learn more about the work being done!**

Find an example of local and federal public institution that impacts the issues you circled.

Can you see & identify differences in the approach of these programs?

Which approaches resonate most with you?

Did your research reveal any misconceptions or surprises?

What more do you want to learn?

**What three new actions will you take in support of service over the next six months?**

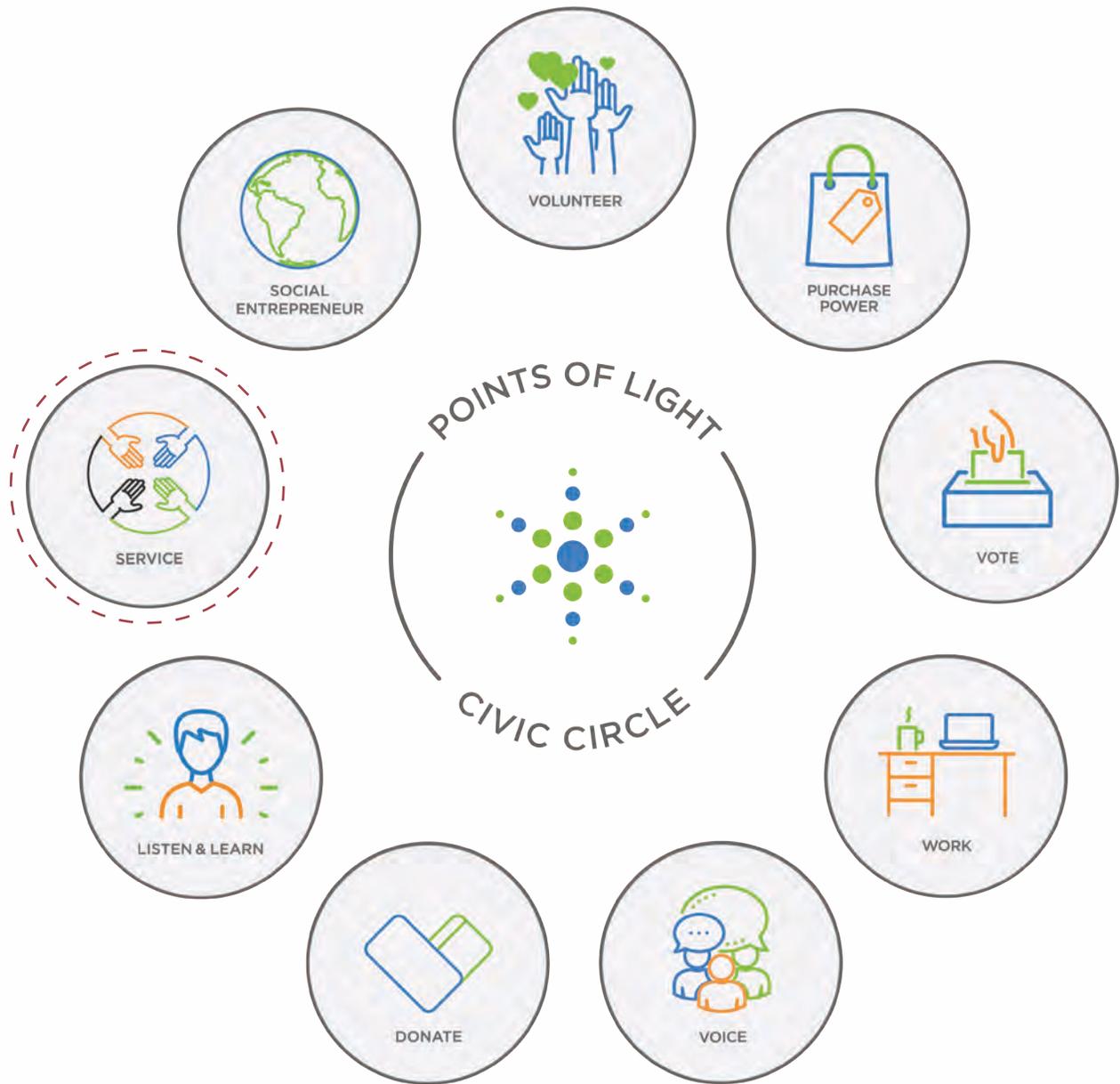
(Get creative and make sure your action steps align with what is needed by the causes and opportunities you are interested in supporting. And remember, it may be as simple as supporting someone in service.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



# Appendix

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/public-service-and-the-federal-government/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.columbiasouthern.edu/blog/march-2020/importance-of-public-service>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/fast-facts/>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://anniewindholz.medium.com/unpacking-white-saviorism-7d7b659dcbb3>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23739286/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/6-spa-projects-empowering-communities-around-world/>
- <sup>7</sup> [https://www.serviceyearalliance.org/impact\\_of\\_service\\_years](https://www.serviceyearalliance.org/impact_of_service_years)
- <sup>8</sup> [https://www.serviceyearalliance.org/pathways\\_after\\_service\\_report](https://www.serviceyearalliance.org/pathways_after_service_report)
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/11/16/veterans-may-earn-more-post-military-careers-study-shows.html>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.americorpsalums.org/news/15503/Study-Finds-Alums-More-Active-in-Public-Service-and-Civic-Engagement.htm>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/06/young-americans-are-less-trusting-of-other-people>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/fast-facts/>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/military-size-by-country>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://medium.com/@inspire2serveUS/mandatory-service-around-the-globe-c05e11810cfc>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/civilian-conservation-corps>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/first-standing-army>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/07/21/scandinavia-leads-the-world-in-public-sector>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/un-women-2020-gender-equality/>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://pediaa.com/difference-between-civil-servant-and-public-servant/>
- <sup>22</sup> [https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/gap\\_year](https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/gap_year)
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/student-loan-forgiveness.asp>
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/national-service-programs>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/private%20sector>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.google.com/search?q=public+good+definition>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/public%20sector>
- <sup>28</sup> <https://pediaa.com/difference-between-civil-servant-and-public-servant/>
- <sup>29</sup> <https://www.elmhurst.edu/blog/what-is-service-learning/>
- <sup>30</sup> <http://docs.serviceyear.org/en/articles/678752-what-is-a-service-year>



Points of Light is a global nonprofit organization that inspires, equips and mobilizes millions of people to take action that changes the world. We envision a world in which every individual discovers the power to make a difference, creating healthy communities in vibrant, participatory societies. Through affiliates in 200 cities across 37 countries, and in partnership with thousands of nonprofits and corporations, Points of Light engages 5 million volunteers in 14 million hours of service each year. We bring the power of people to where it's needed most.

For more information, go to [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org).



**POINTS  
OF LIGHT**