



## ***Encore Service: Boomers + AmeriCorps = A Stronger Nonprofit Sector***

*Michelle Hynes and Nancy Peterson, Civic Ventures  
with Toby Chalberg, formerly at HandsOn Network/Points of Light Institute*

Why should anyone in the United States ever go hungry?

That's the question Gary Maxworthy kept asking himself. At the age of 56, with more than 30 years in the food distribution industry, he had come to two conclusions. First, he realized that while there are many factors contributing to hunger in this country, lack of food isn't one of them. Second, Maxworthy determined it was time for him to do something about the problem.

Maxworthy joined AmeriCorps\*VISTA and began work with the San Francisco Food Bank. While there he founded Farm to Family, an organization that distributes not-quite-perfect produce to California food banks. Each week the project distributes fresh fruit and vegetables to half a million people. Last year alone, Farm to Family distributed 60 million pounds of fresh produce across the state.

National service launched Gary Maxworthy's encore career – and led to an idea that's making California's poorest families healthier. Maxworthy's example, combined with a crucial change in the law, could launch a new chapter for the future of national service.

### ***History in the Making***

In April 2009, President Obama signed the Serve America Act into law, reauthorizing and expanding national service programs like AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America and Senior Corps. The law emphasizes service by people of all ages, and it redefines the role of the Corporation for National and Community Service as a capacity-builder for the nonprofit sector.

*“All too often, we fail to draw upon the experience, knowledge and ideas of older Americans. The potential pool of Americans 55 years of age and older who serve their communities is substantial and expected to grow by more than 22 percent in the next decade. Today, more than half of the individuals considered a part of the baby boomer generation are interested in providing meaningful service to their communities, but research shows that they are not adequately connected to national service opportunities.”*

– U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, introducing the Encore Service Act of 2008, the components of which were added to the Serve America Act

One of the key innovations in the new law is the “encore service” provision, which sets a goal of dedicating 10 percent of AmeriCorps competitive grant funds and positions to programs that focus on engaging people 55 and older. The timing could not be better as the nation's 78 million boomers – often called the most educated and economically productive generation in history – are making plans now for how they'll spend their next two decades.

The generation forged in the social activism of the 1960s wants to remain engaged in civic life into their 60s and beyond. Civic Ventures' research<sup>1</sup> and studies by AARP<sup>2</sup> show that many boomers and other experienced Americans are seeking ways to continue working, but not in their current jobs. They want opportunities that improve the quality of life in their communities – what Civic Ventures calls “encore careers.” In fact, the 2008 MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures Encore Career Survey shows that half of respondents aged 44 to 70 who aren't already engaged in encore careers said they'd like to find work that combines continued income with personal meaning and a chance for social impact.

Considering research and demographics alongside the needs of our nation's cities, schools, health care system and the environment, it's clear that the time is right to channel boomers' interests and experience to work for the common good.

The challenge for many people who are interested in encore careers is that they need a way to get started. They don't know the nonprofit world, its networks and its culture. And they don't have experience working in the sector. To date, there are almost no experiential pathways that give people an opportunity to get that experience, to try out working in a social-purpose job.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, many nonprofits don't have experience recruiting, engaging and deploying people 55-plus to help meet their missions and get critical work done in new ways. So just as many people 55 and older need bridges to nonprofits, many nonprofits need bridges to people who are looking for encore career opportunities and who might be a great new source of talent.

National service can be a solution. Just as AmeriCorps has proven successful in helping younger people explore, prepare for and pursue careers in nonprofit fields, encore service can be a powerful pathway for older adults, helping them successfully shift to encore careers. And national service can help nonprofits find people who can bring experience and skills to advance the missions of their organizations.

### ***Talent at the Ready***

President Obama has made a call to service by "people of all ages," a cornerstone of his service agenda. Congress included the "encore service" provisions, expanding the number of AmeriCorps programs that engage participants 55 and older, and made other changes to the legislation intended to make service more attractive to this age group.<sup>4</sup> The encore service provision further states that these programs should "take advantage of the skills and experience that such participants offer in the design and implementation of the program," underscoring the special talent that people 55-plus bring to national service assignments.

Given AmeriCorps' current size and projected growth, in the next two years alone the 10 percent goal could translate into at least 10,000 additional people with 20-plus years of work experience serving alongside younger AmeriCorps members in assignments focused on meeting compelling needs in communities.

We will, in fact, need people of all ages to answer the President's call to serve. A new report by renowned Northeastern University labor economist Barry Bluestone predicts that there could be 5 million potential job vacancies in the United States over the next decade – nearly half of them in education, health care, government and nonprofit organizations. And, Bluestone says, workers over 55 will be needed to fill these jobs.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Service as a Solution***

As leaders like Shirley Sagawa<sup>6</sup> and John Bridgeland<sup>7</sup> have argued, national service programs are poised to play a significant role in engaging the nation's human capital to help solve critical problems. AmeriCorps programs not only deliver cost-effective, high-impact service, they also build individuals' skills, foster lifetime involvement in community problem solving and build lasting organizational capacity by attracting and developing committed talent to the nonprofit sector work force.

According to a 2008 study conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps alumni are much more likely to pursue jobs in nonprofit or public service fields.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on the study's release, David Eisner, former CEO of the agency, noted that "more than 60 percent of our alums are working in nonprofits or government." He called the finding "way more than statistically significant." In fact, Eisner said, "AmeriCorps is becoming America's most important pipeline to careers in nonprofits and government – this at the same time that crisis-level shortfalls in leadership and work force are looming in these areas."<sup>9</sup>

Patrick Corvington, the agency's new CEO, has emphasized similar themes in his comments on the Corporation's expanded role in building lasting capacity for the nonprofit sector.

As envisioned by the encore service provisions of the Serve America Act, well-designed AmeriCorps assignments can provide needed talent for nonprofits, while also serving as a bridge for people who want to move into social-purpose work. By thinking of these AmeriCorps assignments as transitions into encore careers, we can fully leverage the potential 55-plus service participants represent.

To date though, AmeriCorps investments have typically focused on a "next generation" comprised of 20- and 30-somethings. While this profile is the most common among AmeriCorps members, the next generation that the sector can best put to work might not all be in their 20s and 30s. In fact, experienced and motivated encore career seekers are searching for their next opportunities right now.

#### ***Meet Joe Brockmann, 56, AmeriCorps Member***

Right now in Harrington, Maine, a retired sea urchin diver named Joe Brockmann is serving with the Community HealthCorps, a program of the National Association of Community Health Centers.<sup>10</sup> This program places AmeriCorps members in community health centers to deliver a variety of preventive health and community outreach activities. Brockmann, 56, could no longer physically perform the duties of his midlife career but needed to continue working. His service with the Harrington Family Health Center was inspired by his own family's experience. Losing a cousin to lung cancer led Brockmann to choose an AmeriCorps assignment in a smoking cessation program.

After Brockmann completes his service this fall, he wants to continue working on this issue. He is a passionate and experienced advocate with valuable, longstanding roots in his community.

What happens when Brockmann finishes his AmeriCorps assignment? How can AmeriCorps help support his transition into an encore career in health care, putting the value of his experience to work not just for a year but for a decade or more?

#### **The Promise & the Challenge of Encore Service**

Generations Incorporated is a unique organization specifically designed to unite older adults and youth in service programs that build nonprofit capacity and strengthen communities. The organization hosts a robust portfolio of national service programs: a full-time AmeriCorps state project, an AmeriCorps\*VISTA program that supports capacity building for Generations Incorporated and other Massachusetts nonprofits, and an Experience Corps program that places 350 older adult participants as tutors in high-need neighborhoods in Boston and nearby Revere.

Boomers and retirees represent one of Boston's fastest-growing demographic groups, and many are seeking ways to get involved. "More and more professional people – lawyers, accountants, store managers, people 55 or 57 years old – are coming to me looking for opportunities to work in nonprofits," says Mary Gunn, Generations Incorporated's executive director. "They're looking for management roles, ways they can apply their career experience."

While Generations Incorporated has been very successful with its national service programs, it has also learned that AmeriCorps and VISTA aren't perfect fits for experienced people. For example, while VISTA's capacity-building purpose may be well-suited for an encore-seeking professional, the full-time, year-long commitment can be a barrier for someone who's taking care of an elderly parent or a grandchild. Conversely, the direct-service functions of the part-time Experience Corps roles don't enable seasoned professionals to apply their management skills or explore varied potential job roles in the nonprofit sector.

Gunn has found creative ways to work within existing national service program parameters, like designing leadership roles within intergenerational teams for experienced participants. Without a peer cohort of other encore-oriented programs as collaborators, though, it is difficult to support career transitions for more than a few.

Gunn says she's exploring new approaches, such as using private funding to design new roles for experienced participants. But she is also eager to see new options within national service that can provide a critical pathway to encore careers for a more diverse range of potential participants.

Gary Maxworthy found his own way to AmeriCorps\*VISTA. Others like Brockmann have happened on service as a way to engage in social-purpose work. The opportunity now – for national service and for the nonprofit sector – is to move beyond do-it-yourself methods that help a few to a systematic approach that can help thousands find intensive service opportunities leading to encore careers in sectors where experienced talent is most needed.

### *Leveraging the Value of Experience*

Despite the breakthrough that the encore service provisions in the Serve America Act represent, changes in policies and practices are still needed to maximize the value of experience during and after AmeriCorps service.

A few small changes could make a big difference. For example:

**Recruitment:** AmeriCorps can't successfully recruit boomers if its messages and images are all about younger members. To attract people 55-plus, materials will have to feature photos, images and work that include and appeal to this age cohort. AmeriCorps also needs to highlight stories, like Maxworthy's and Brockmann's, of members who have successfully made the transition from encore service to encore careers.

**Service assignments:** Because people bring different strengths at different stages of life and work, programs should develop and design service assignments that explore, respect and leverage members' previous work experience. The Corporation for National and Community Service and/or state service commissions could facilitate this shift by convening a special working group of expert practitioners who are already doing creative work in this area and by engaging grantees during virtual or in-person meetings.

**Training:** The Corporation and state commissions can ensure that pre-service and in-service training are appropriate for people with different levels and types of experience. Supplementary "Life After AmeriCorps" resources and activities could recognize the interests of older AmeriCorps members who are seeking post-service careers. Multigenerational programs can also take advantage of cross-age mentoring in specific job and job search skills.

**Promoting the Education Award:** The new provision for the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, allowing an individual age 55 or older to transfer the award to another eligible person (such as a child or grandchild), may be a powerful recruiting tool. For AmeriCorps members seeking encore careers, the opportunity to use the awards themselves may be even more attractive – to brush up on specific skills, gain knowledge about a particular field or start a certificate program. Partnerships with community colleges, special "college fairs" for encore service participants, multigenerational seminars about going back to school (or choosing a college for the first time), could all be valuable components of in-service training or post-service placement efforts.

**Post-service placement:** Similarly, efforts to build nonprofit sector capacity should consider how encore service participants interested in encore careers can help solve gaps in the sector's talent pipeline. Creative approaches to offering encore career opportunities can dramatically expand the amount and the range of talent available to respond to the "compelling unmet needs in education, the environment, healthy futures, veterans and economic opportunity" emphasized in the Serve America Act.

**Alumni networks:** AmeriCorps Alums could partner with organizations such as Encore Service Corps International (formerly Peace Corps Encore) to develop post-service activities that would be attractive to people 55-plus or that take advantage of an increasingly multigenerational alumni pool.

## ***Moving Forward Together***

The Serve America Act promises a future in which encore service becomes one way for people 55 and older to serve their communities, alongside other national service participants. Here are just a few suggestions about how to make that promise real.

### **The Corporation for National and Community Service can:**

- Support development of an AmeriCorps campaign to recruit people 55-plus into direct-service and capacity-building roles in areas of compelling unmet needs.
- Provide technical assistance to national-direct grantees, state commissions and state offices that leads to a greater number of high-quality encore service applications.
- Clarify the allowable activities for AmeriCorps participants with new attention to examples of leadership roles and specialized-skill assignments for encore service participants.
- Create incentives to achieve the 10 percent encore service target in future notices of funds availability and the grantmaking process.
- Give preference through the awards process to organizations that propose encore service activities as pathways to encore career transitions, thereby building sustainable human resource capacity in nonprofit organizations.

### **State commissions can:**

- Encourage encore service innovation in their AmeriCorps priorities and state plans.
- Provide support to AmeriCorps programs to effectively engage encore talent and to help transition encore service participants to new careers in nonprofit organizations.
- Cooperate with CNCS state offices to learn from and advance Senior Corps and AmeriCorps\*VISTA opportunities as additional experiential pathways to social purpose work.

### **Program practitioners can:**

- Collaborate to develop “Life after AmeriCorps” resources for encore service participants.
- Coordinate support across programs on a local, regional, statewide or virtual basis for transitioning encore service participants to new careers in nonprofit organizations.

### **Policymakers and thought leaders can:**

- Support full funding for AmeriCorps and encourage continued attention to the 10 percent encore service provision as one aspect of service for all ages.
- Explore tax incentives to support companies that work in partnership with AmeriCorps programs to help professionals transition to social-purpose encore careers.
- Consider tax credits or other tax incentives for 55-plus AmeriCorps participants, because some common credits (such as those for dependents) may no longer be available to them.

### **The nonprofit effectiveness and capacity community can:**

- Incorporate encore talent as a strategic component of meeting the leadership and work force needs of the sector.
- Help nonprofits of all sizes identify promising roles for experienced professionals.
- Pursue and promote a research agenda that evaluates the potential and the impact of emerging encore service models as the field develops.
- Prepare the sector to embrace a multigenerational workplace, from millennials to boomers and beyond, one that integrates national service participants of all ages in high-impact roles.

## ***In Conclusion***

The Serve America Act has created important new opportunities for service by all Americans, including boomers. The great potential of the encore service provision is not only to tap the talent of experienced adults for AmeriCorps assignments, but to help people transition into sustained social-purpose work in encore careers, just as national service has been so successful in doing with young people.

Encore service – properly marketed, well-supported, thoughtfully deployed and with appropriate support for post-service transition to encore careers – can make AmeriCorps a powerful new pathway for people who want to make a long-term commitment of their skills and experience to the common good. The result will be a more engaged citizenry and a more strongly equipped sector for solving our communities’ toughest challenges.

## ***About the Authors***

**Michelle Hynes** leads Civic Ventures’ work on encore careers in education and youth-serving organizations. From 2003-2009, she managed the growth of Civic Ventures’ Experience Corps program – doubling Experience Corps’ size; facilitating a major external evaluation of the program’s impact; and spinning it off as an independent national organization. Originally trained as a middle school reading teacher, Hynes has worked in the nonprofit sector for nearly 20 years as a program developer, organizational leader, board member and volunteer.

**Nancy Peterson** leads Civic Ventures’ efforts to develop community-based networks of people and programs interested in creating stronger pathways to encore careers. For more than 25 years, she has also worked in the San Francisco Bay Area, statewide in California and nationally to advance the field of community service and volunteerism. In 2009, Peterson led the development and implementation of the first year of Civic Ventures’ Silicon Valley Encore Fellows pilot, which served as one inspiration for the encore fellows provisions in the Serve America Act. She is the author of a study of senior service in the state of California.

**Toby Chalberg** can speak from experience about national service as a pathway to a nonprofit sector career. He is an alumnus of two different national service programs – City Year and the National Civilian Community Corps. After serving in team leader roles as a corps member, he joined the Hands On Network staff as its Director of National Service. Chalberg served in multiple leadership positions over nearly 10 years at Hands On, eventually playing a critical role in the merger between Hands On Network and the Points of Light Institute. Chalberg is currently an independent consultant focusing on strategy and resource development for nonprofit organizations.

---

<sup>1</sup> MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures. (2008). *Encore Career Survey*. [www.civicventures.org/publications/surveys/encore-career-survey.cfm](http://www.civicventures.org/publications/surveys/encore-career-survey.cfm)

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, AARP and Civic Enterprises. (2008). *More to Give: Tapping the Talents of the Baby Boomer, Silent and Greatest Generations*. [www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/aarp\\_moretogive.pdf](http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/aarp_moretogive.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> There are, however, a few notable examples of experiential pathways to encore careers, such as the Silicon Valley Encore Fellows program ([www.encore.org/fellowships](http://www.encore.org/fellowships)) and the Encore!Hartford fellowship program ([continuingstudies.uconn.edu/professional/nonprofit/current.html](http://continuingstudies.uconn.edu/professional/nonprofit/current.html)).

<sup>4</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, Summary of the Serve America Act. [www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/09\\_0421\\_serveact\\_summary.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/09_0421_serveact_summary.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bluestone, Barry and Melnick, Mark. (2010). *After the Recovery: Help Needed, The Coming Labor Shortage and How People in Encore Careers Can Help Solve It*. Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Northeastern University, Boston, for Civic Ventures. See also related reports on education, health care, green jobs at [www.encore.org/research](http://www.encore.org/research).

- 
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, Sagawa, Shirley. (2010). *How Quickly Can National Service Grow? Service Programs are Primed and Ready for Growth*. Center for American Progress, Washington D.C.  
[www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/02/pdf/national\\_service.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/02/pdf/national_service.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> Bridgeland, John and Reed, Bruce. (Dec. 14, 2009). "Put Service on Steroids." *Huffington Post*.  
[www.huffingtonpost.com/john-bridgeland/put-service-on-steroids\\_b\\_391297.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-bridgeland/put-service-on-steroids_b_391297.html)
- <sup>8</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development. (2007). *AmeriCorps: Changing Lives, Changing America*. [www2.illinois.gov/serve/Documents/AmeriCorps\\_Lives\\_America.pdf](http://www2.illinois.gov/serve/Documents/AmeriCorps_Lives_America.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service. (2008). "Rigorous Longitudinal Study of AmeriCorps Finds Significant Impacts Eight Years Later." Press Release.  
[www.nationalservice.gov/about/newsroom/releases\\_detail.asp?tbl\\_pr\\_id=1036](http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/newsroom/releases_detail.asp?tbl_pr_id=1036)
- <sup>10</sup> For more information on the Community HealthCorps, visit [www.communityhealthcorps.org](http://www.communityhealthcorps.org).