

# 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.

Last year, due to limits of their budget, CNCS had to turn down more than 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. 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 within CNCS, 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. 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, and develop cross-cultural understanding.

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

### **Examples of Arts Program Previously Funded By CNCS**

**Music National Service** of San Francisco 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.

**Digital Arts Service Corps** of Boston works to build the capacity of individual organizations by providing resources, trainings, and related support. Tech-savvy, full-time and on-site AmeriCorps VISTA members team up with organizations and individuals in need to create and support capacity-building projects such as low-power radio stations, media arts and technology centers, rural broadband initiatives, media reform policy advocacy, and a strong and diverse public media infrastructure.

**The Young Men's Academy at MacArthur South**, a 6–12 grade alternative school in Miami, FL, reaches young men who have been expelled from the traditional classroom. An arts-based service-learning project gave students the opportunity learn indigenous arts and crafts techniques including painting, sculpture, ceramics, ornaments, batik, and woodwork from local artists at ArtSouth. The students then teach their newly acquired skills to local seniors and elementary students who are immobile due to handicap, conduct community arts events, and create public murals.