

# Obama calls on residents to volunteer

By Ann Sanner

The Associated Press  
May 6, 2009

WASHINGTON — Calling on Americans to volunteer, President Obama signed a \$5.7 billion national-service bill on April 21 that triples the size of the AmeriCorps service program during the next eight years and expands ways for students to earn money for college.

"What this legislation does, then, is to help harness this patriotism and connect deeds to needs," said Obama, a former community organizer in Chicago. "It creates opportunities to serve for students, seniors and everyone in between."

The service law expands ways for students and seniors to earn money for college through their volunteer work. It aims to foster and fulfill people's desire to make a difference, such as by mentoring children, cleaning up parks or buildings and weatherizing homes for the poor.

Congress passed the bill last month with largely bipartisan support, and Obama is seeking \$1.1 billion to fund it next year. Some Republicans say it is too costly and is an unnecessary intrusion by government into something Americans already do eagerly and in great numbers.

The legislation provides for gradually increasing the size of the Clinton-era AmeriCorps to 250,000 enrollees from its current 75,000. It outlines five broad categories in which people can direct their service: helping the poor, improving education, encouraging energy efficiency, strengthening access to health care and assisting veterans.

AmeriCorps offers volunteer opportunities including housing construction, youth outreach, disaster response and caring for the elderly. Most receive an annual stipend of slightly less than \$12,000 for working 10 months to a year.

In Oregon, 850 people serve full time in AmeriCorps, said Patricia Bollin, the Oregon AmeriCorps program officer.

In Marion County, 20 people serve in six programs, which include Family YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties and Youth Mentor Programs. Additionally, there are 13 part-time members, who serve as they go to school, placed through Willamette University.

In Polk County, there are two full-time and 18 part-time members through Western Oregon University.

## Get involved

Several ways to get involved in national service:

### LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

To volunteer in your neighborhood, go to <http://www.volunteer.gov>. The Web site, run by the federal government, gives Americans a way to search for service opportunities within a ZIP code or state.

Ask religious leaders or faith-based organizations about ways to help others.

### OLDER AMERICANS

Senior Corps, a government-run program, gives people 55 and older a chance to conduct safety patrols for local police departments, participate in environmental projects or help tutor children. To join, go to [www.getinvolved.gov](http://www.getinvolved.gov) or call (800) 424-8867.

Search for other opportunities through AARP's Web site at [www.aarp.org/createthegood](http://www.aarp.org/createthegood).

### STUDENTS

Ask your guidance counselor, principal or PTA about ways to help in the community.

### COLLEGE AGE AND ADULTS

To join AmeriCorps, go to [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov); for Oregon, go to [www.oregonvolunteers.org](http://www.oregonvolunteers.org) or call (800) 942-2677.

Although it's unclear how much impact the bill will have on Oregon AmeriCorps, Bollin said that Oregon AmeriCorps has applied for stimulus money. If the group receives it, Bollin said that would bring in 60 to 70 members right away.

The bill also ties volunteer work to money for college. People 55 and older could earn \$1,000 education awards by getting involved in public service. The awards can be transferred to a child, a grandchild or someone they mentored .

Students from sixth grade through their senior year of high school could earn a \$500 education award for helping in their neighborhoods during a new summer program.

Michelle Maxwell contributed to this story.