

VIRGINIA COMPACT ON NATIONAL SERVICE

We, as presidents, chancellors or superintendents of institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia, recognize that educating young people to be knowledgeable and caring citizens is central to the missions of our colleges and universities and fundamental to an effective democracy.

We also recognize that, across the nation, many of our communities are fraying with low levels of social trust and commitment. Leading indicators of civic health show steady declines over the last 40 years among Americans nationwide. Service experiences can help bring students of different backgrounds together in common purpose to develop their skills, help solve problems in communities, and foster lifelong habits of civic participation. Virginia colleges and universities have a responsibility to foster learning communities where long-lasting relationships among diverse individuals can be established.

Thus, we support the idea that Virginia institutions of higher education can help prepare citizens for a year of national service. Further, we agree that a service year by 18 to 28 year olds should become a common expectation, opportunity, and civic rite of passage in our nation. We will work on our campuses to instill this service ethic in our cultures and support service-year opportunities for our students.

We commit to work through each of our institutions, and also together as a compact, on one or more of the following initiatives to:

1. Create service years for undergraduates or graduates before, during or after college or graduate school (or as a year-long senior capstone experience, or a prerequisite to or a component of graduate study);
2. Link service years to academic credit;
3. Provide enrollment deferrals for service years;
4. Promote service-year opportunities within existing service-learning programs, Federal Work Study, or other means;
5. Value and encourage service years through admissions, financial aid, career services, designations on diplomas or graduation ceremonies;
6. Develop a certificate program for service-year members to illustrate the skills they gain;
7. Work together to take statewide action to advance service-year opportunities in the Commonwealth;
8. Collect and share data on local, state, regional and national service activities involving undergraduate and graduate students, including those who are serving or have served in existing national service programs, such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, AmeriCorps, or other programs offering full-time or part-time service opportunities;
9. Highlight both Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs and civilian national service opportunities, showing how young Americans can serve their country through the military or in a civilian capacity; and
10. Recognize service-year alumni or students selected for a service year or more (Peace Corps, VISTA, AmeriCorps, ROTC or other national service-programs) at a campus-wide ceremony.

To these ends, we agree to develop ways for presidents, chancellors and superintendents of higher education to stay in touch with one another, whether face-to-face or virtually, to share ideas, seek collaborations, and develop academic/community partnerships across the Commonwealth.

We look forward to a future in which our graduates can answer the question, “where did you do your service year?” and in which they know their colleges and universities helped them become more knowledgeable and caring citizens. We are committed to graduating students who, by their example, help to strengthen our democracy and renew American citizenship.

[Signatures of each of the Presidents, Chancellors and Superintendents from every college in the Commonwealth of Virginia]