

Service Year Recruitment Best Practices

Public awareness of what a service year is a significant barrier to recruiting qualified candidates for service year positions. In a market survey that Service Year Alliance commissioned to Penn Schoen Berland in 2015, we learned that 76% of youth aged 14-17, 62% of millennials, and 72% of parents of youth and millennials do not know that service year opportunities exist. For comparison, imagine if 75% our country's citizens were not aware of opportunities to serve in the military. An entire generation is currently missing out on the opportunity to be actively engaged citizens participate in the transformative experience a service year provides.

The lack of awareness presents challenges to service year program efforts who are working to recruit large pools of highly qualified, diverse, and dedicated candidates. To overcome these challenges, Service Year Alliance has compiled the findings from our market research and spoken to dozens of Service Year host organizations on best practices for recruitment and raising awareness. We've collected the best strategies and tactics for recruiting a pool of highly qualified and eager candidates. These methods have proven successful for dozens of service year programs from across the country in service year corps member recruitment.

Top 6 Strategies for Recruiting Service Year Corps Members and Raising Awareness of Service Years

1. Develop a long pipeline to a service year

Connect to local middle and high schools, community colleges, and other academic institutions to reach younger audiences. Though many students may not be eligible for a service year in the immediate future, planting the idea early can help them to better plan and prepare for a year of service as part of their journey to academic and career success.

How to do it:

- Host informational sessions with volunteer and after-school groups in middle schools and high schools.
- Coordinate a service project with middle and high school sports teams and clubs.
- Participate in college and career fairs.
- Reach out to and develop relationships with career counselors.
- Provide campus career service offices with information and brochures about your service year program.
- Collect list of all local colleges, universities, and community colleges in area relevant departments (education, social sciences, environmental conservation, etc.) and develop partnerships with academic advisors, professors, and department heads in academic tracks that overlap with your work.

- Your current corps members may be able to offer personal connections to higher ed faculty and staff. Consider asking your current corps members, applicants, and alumni to refer you to a professor or advisor who can refer new applicants or disseminate information about your service year program.
- Leverage the campus Greek system to organize service projects and host info sessions on your program and other service year opportunities in your community.
- Connect with minority student groups on campus, like MANNRs (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences) and AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering Society).

2. Partner with other service year organizations

Other service year organizations in your region are likely facing similar challenges in developing a broad, diverse pool of candidates. Consider teaming up with these programs to reach a wider audience, and to have a bigger impact with your recruitment resources. Find other national programs in your area, or reach out to your state commission program director to find other programs in your region that can coordinate recruitment efforts.

How to do it:

- Partner with other local service year programs to develop the long pipeline described in the previous section. Co-present at career fairs, create shared marketing materials, cross-post your service year opportunities, and send deferred candidates to other programs.
- Have a shared online presence using a Network profile on the Service Year Exchange to direct potential candidates to all of the programs available in the local area. This way if someone may not be perfect for one program, they can learn about others in the area.
- Partner with the local school system, community college, or workforce development board to help spread the word about service year opportunities. Some of these institutions may also have access to trainings and wraparound services that your corps members can utilize during their service term.

3. Work your existing network

Your current corps members might have the best network for identifying passionate and energetic young people who are ready to tackle big challenges. Consider creating an incentive system for corps members and staff to recruit their friends, family members, and other contacts. First-year corps members may also be enticed to stay with an additional benefit package, such as additional trainings, professional development, or living supports.

Your network of service year supporters is likely deeper than you think. Include your service year alumni, staff, volunteers, partners, and board members in outreach efforts. Encourage

them to nominate candidates from within their personal networks of friends, family, religious groups, sports teams and social clubs, and professional networks. Provide these recruitment champions with the language and tools necessary for promoting service year openings far and wide.

Your service year alumni are also incredibly valuable additions to the recruitment pipeline. Not only do they help to expand your network, but they can help to engage with candidates and prospective corps members during the application process. Try asking a few of your alumni who can speak positively and articulately about the service year experience to participate in the recruitment process and answer applicant questions.

How to do it:

- Share template emails and social media for staff and corps members to nominate their peers to apply for a service year. Use the [digital recruitment toolkit](#) at about.serviceyear.org for templates and [guidelines](#) for communicating about service years.
- Allocate a budget or find an in-kind donor who can provide a small award or incentive for productive referrals.
- Provide talking points for current corps members and recruitment champions to direct their peers and network to apply for a service year position.
- Create a competition among corps members to see who can recruit the most candidates
- Have corps members tell their story to other potential candidates – create a video or written story on current corps members, have them participate in recruitment fairs if that is allowable under their service terms.

4. Leverage owned and paid media

Owned media (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram) can be highly effective marketing tools. Facebook pages and ads reach a wide audience of tech-savvy, young adults. Include these platforms in your organization's media strategy to consistently promote the service year program throughout the year to develop your audience, and to communicate application opportunities and information sessions. Paid media can also reach a wide network, and can be equally effective when used in a comprehensive recruitment strategy.

How to do it:

- Post ads on radio stations, local newspapers, and college newspapers.
- Update your website to include comprehensive information about what a service year is and what the application process is like, not just information about the position description.

- Include stories on your website about your service year corps members and the populations they serve. Potential corps members are looking to relate to other individuals who have chosen service to decide whether it's right for them.
- Utilize Facebook ads and Google Adwords to promote your position listings
 - In terms of messaging, ads that appeal to people's self-interest tend to outperform ads that appeal to a sense of altruism (for example, emphasis career & financial benefits vs. impacting communities).
- Regularly post to social media about your service year program to highlight site visits, social interactions, accomplishments and stories to support recruitment efforts.

5. Tailor your message to distinct audiences

The PSB research that Service Year Alliance commissioned revealed several key messages that resonate with different audiences when discussing a service year. For example, researchers found that parents, millennials, and youth age 14-17 who are not familiar with service years were most concerned about distance from family, affordability, doubt about the opportunity, safety, lack of information/familiarity, and the potential to be taken off a career/education track.

To appropriately address these concerns for each audience, emphasize the opportunities and incentives that come with a service year experience. For example, the top three service year benefits that each group ranked are the opportunity to gain skills, build experience, and experience personal growth. We found is that tangible educational incentives – such as class credits and tuition awards – drive interest. The terms “rewarding” and “educational” are top traits to emphasize for Parents and Youth, for Millennials “life-changing.”

How to do it:

- Emphasize different incentives and use specific messages for different audiences, such as the following:
 - Youth Age 14-17: Personal growth, exposure to other cultures, aspirational/greater good
 - Millennials: personal Growth, Exposure to other cultures, tangible rewards of stipend and tuition award
 - Parents: personal growth, education
- Provide information up-front about the barriers associated with doing a year of service; offer budgeting tools and guidelines for applying for benefits, and outline additional supports that corps members will receive during their service term.
- Connect prospective corps members to current and alumni corps members so they can share their experiences of living on a stipend while developing skills & experience.

6. Post your service year position far and wide

The following job boards have been suggested as some of the most useful for identifying qualified candidates. Once you've created a position description on the Service Year Exchange, consider cross-posting the opening on these platforms to reach a bigger network of young change makers!

How to do it:

- Service Year Exchange - Post positions, share on social media, review and search for candidates
- Local college/alumni job boards
- Craigslist
- Indeed
- LinkedIn
- MyAmeriCorps/eGrants (the AmeriCorps recruitments portal)
- Idealist
- Internmatch