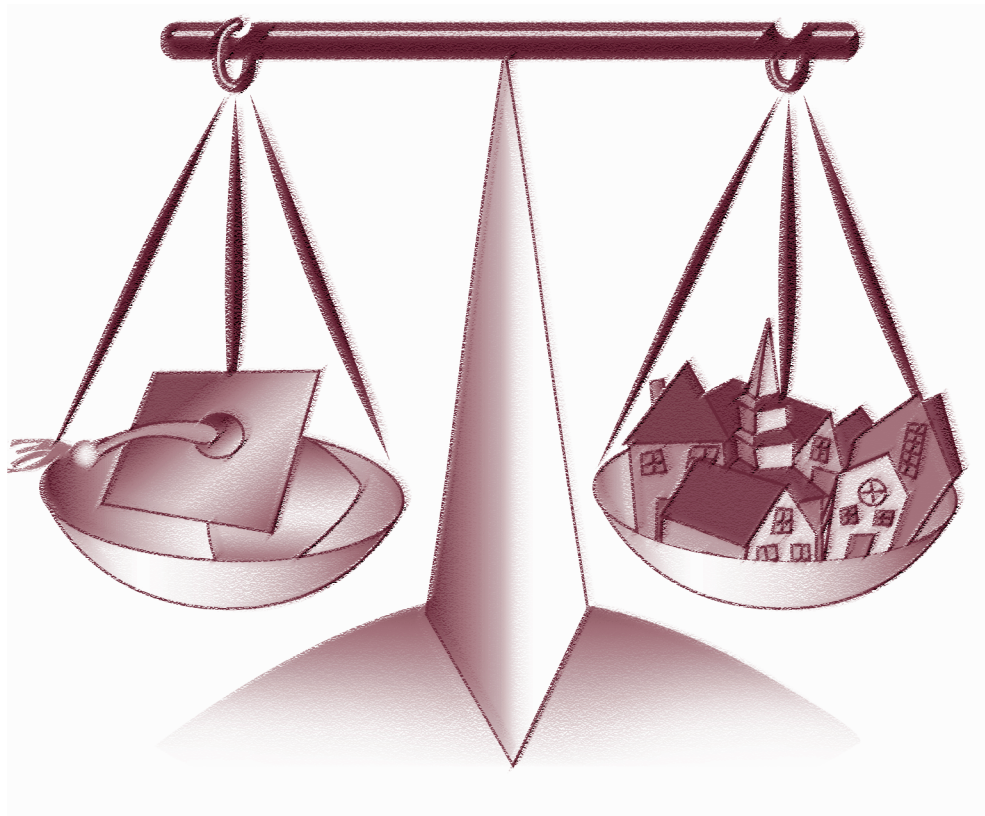


to serve the **college** or the **community**?

Results from a Study on Community Service Federal Work-Study



IN HIS 2002 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, PRESIDENT BUSH suggested that colleges and universities increase the portion of their Federal Work-Study (FWS) dedicated to community service to 50%. Such a commitment, the president said, would allow 500,000 students to serve the community each year. Currently, institutions are only required to dedicate 7% of their annual FWS allotment to community service positions.

The president's suggestion raised alarm and criticism from financial aid professionals and others in higher education, but also sparked useful debate regarding the proper

role of colleges and universities in preparing students for lives of civic engagement. Some scoffed at the suggestion of a higher mandate, while others saw the increased community service requirement as an opportunity to re-imagine the campus' public purpose.

In response to President Bush's statement and the subsequent interest it generated among some Congressional leaders, Campus Compact coordinated a study on FWS positions dedicated to community service. Campus Compact is a coalition of more than 900 college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education.



The study was funded through a grant from a federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service. The goal of the study was to examine current community service work-study efforts, document good practices, and understand practitioners' opinions regarding a potential increase in the mandated percentage. From these findings Campus Compact also hoped to create a set of policy recommendations for improving the use and increasing the amount of FWS funds in the community.

In 2002, eight focus groups were conducted in California, Colorado, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Each group included financial aid administrators and community service-learning coordinators (or similar professional staff), and in some cases other campus administrators, faculty, or students.

Seventy-eight focus group participants from 52 institutions represented diverse public and private, urban and rural, two- and four-year institutions. Participants also represented a range of experience levels with community service work-study. In addition to the three-hour focus group, each participant completed a written survey.

Current Program Structures

The study found that 85% of the 52 participating institutions rely on the financial aid department to provide significant coordination for community service work-study, and 50% involve their community service office or a similar department. Forty percent involve a combination of the two.

Other campus departments that might provide significant coordination include the education department, human resources, academic dean's office, career center, dean of students, or the sociology department. In most cases the campuses had created these partnerships between departments without much guidance, leaving each to find their own way to best employ community service work-study funds.

The top three most frequently mentioned challenges involved with coordinating community service work-study programs were coordinating multiple campus departments; internal campus communication; and the need for more staff.

When asked what additional resources or assistance are needed to manage community service work-study programs, the four most frequent responses were: financial assistance; additional staffing; training for staff, students and community; and clearer guidelines on what constitutes "community service." One participant, a vice-chancellor, commented, "I'm not inclined go beyond 10% until we achieve better coordination on campus and with the community." These challenges illustrate the need for more formal guidance on the complex issues that community service

work-study presents.

Of those institutions that recorded how many students participate in their community service work-study program annually, one-third indicated they place 10 to 49 students, one-third place 50 to 99 students, and one-third have 100 or more students involved in community service jobs.

All of the institutions that reported 100 or more students participating in the community service work-study program also have a student body of over 10,000 full-time students. It is clear that placing students in the community presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges depending on institutional type and size.

Employing Students Effectively

The three most important issues or challenges in working effectively with students in community service work-study were found to be training students for the experience; helping students find positions that match their interests and abilities; and marketing the opportunities to students.

Participants indicated that pay rates for community service work-study students range from \$5.15 to \$17.00 nationally. Of those institutions that listed their traditional work-study pay rate as compared with the community service work-study pay rate, 35% have the same rate for both, while 3% start students at the same level but allow community service participants to earn more at the top of the scale. Twenty-one percent start community service at a higher level but have the same rate of pay at the high end of the scale, and 35% indicated community service students start at a higher rate and also have a higher potential rate at the top of the scale.

When asked about the typical positions filled by community service work-study students, 56% of participants indicated that their students serve as tutors in the community, while 23% said their students provide office assistance for non-profit organizations. Other common jobs include community program coordinators, mentoring, and childcare providers. Thirteen percent of institutions indicated at least some of their students serve on campus in roles such as library assistant, learning center tutor, or theater box office worker.

Collaborating with Community Organizations

The ability of community organizations to pay the match required by federal law was another significant concern for participants, and campuses handle it in multiple ways. Of institutions that reported on payment of the required match for federal funds, nearly half indicated that they require community organizations to pay 25% of FWS students'

wages. Many of these institutions also allow under-resourced community organizations to pay a 10% match, as is allowed in the federal rules. About 10% of the institutions participating in the focus groups do not require community organizations to pay any portion of students' wages for community service work. These institutions pay the required federal match from institutional or state work-study funds.

“We don’t want to be a burden to our community. For some organizations it would be nothing more than a burden,” noted one community service coordinator from Pennsylvania. The remaining institutions require community organizations to pay amounts varying from 10% to 50% of students' wages.

When asked to list the most important issues or challenges to working effectively with community organizations in community service work-study, the three top responses were communication issues; site supervisor time constraints or concerns about supervisors; and training or orientation for partners. Training has been a consistent issue in working between departments, working with students, and working with community partners, and represents one of the primary overarching concerns of the participants.

Community Service Benefits and Challenges

Participants listed numerous benefits that community service work-study provides student participants, institutions, and community organizations. These include helping students balance a need to work with an interest in community service; benefiting community organizations by providing affordable employees for a longer period than traditional volunteer or service-learning placements; and strengthening campus-community partnerships and relations.

One participant summarized these benefits, saying “community service work-study is creating a lot of ‘good’—good for students, good for communities, good for town/gown relations.” Another participant envisioned the increased percentage of community service work-study as a way to invest in their institution’s “commitment to the public good.”

However, the benefits of offering an effective community service work-study program are tempered by very real obstacles. The greatest challenges reported by participants include the following:

- **Paying for the extra staff time needed to manage an effective program.** Participants indicated that coordination of community service work-study is rarely included in anyone's official job description, and is often an "add-on" to staff responsibilities.
- **Dividing leadership and management roles among**

various campus departments. It is often unclear to campus staff which of the various responsibilities related to community service work-study should be assigned to financial aid, community service, and other departments.

- **Defining what types of student positions are appropriate.** Federal guidelines require 7% of FWS funds be used for “community service” positions. However, the current guidelines also allow campus leaders wide latitude in defining “community service.” Many participants have requested additional guidance on the federal regulations pertaining to this issue.
- **Meeting the 7% requirement.** Campuses struggle in different ways to meet the 7% requirement, including recruiting students, developing community positions, and competition with on-campus positions.
- **Locating and developing good community-based positions.** Often, financial aid administrators are left with the responsibility to determine work-study job placements in the community and struggle to find appropriate community organizations and form solid partnerships.
- **Ensuring good supervision and support for students.** In many cases, students who want to do their work-study in the community are "on their own" and responsible for locating the positions themselves. These students generally do not receive any special orientation, training, or reflection in conjunction with the experience.
- **Other administrative concerns.** Numerous other administrative concerns might include liability issues, transportation problems, managing off-campus timesheets, and tracking matching funds from community organizations.

Opinions Regarding the Mandated Percentage

When asked what level the mandated percentage of FWS for community service should be, participants responded:

- No mandated percentage (12%)
- Should be 5% (5%)
- Should be 7% (13%)
- Should be 10% (24%)
- Should be over 10% (21%)
- Did not answer (27%)

The study showed that participants from certain types, sizes, or locations of institutions are no more or less likely to favor a lower or higher mandated level. However, financial aid administrators were less likely than other focus group participants to favor increasing the mandate.

“We have trouble meeting the [7%] mandate,” stated one financial aid director. “It is difficult to ask already overworked staff to now become job-location experts.”

Many focus group participants supported the creation



Principles for Building an Effective Community Service Federal Work-Study Program

1. Integrate community service work-study into the institution's overall civic engagement mission and programs.
2. Create program goals for community service work-study and an evaluation plan to measure progress.
3. Formalize a structured institutional system to provide oversight and coordination, and to ensure the optimal use of resources and capacity.
4. Offer a range of community service positions that are challenging, developmentally appropriate, and contribute to the common good.
5. Actively and effectively market the opportunities to students and community partners.
6. Ensure that students receive a thorough orientation, are properly trained for their positions, and have opportunities for reflection and connections to academic study.
7. Contribute to student success through effective monitoring, ongoing supervision, and recognition of student contributions.
8. Create partnerships with community organizations built on open communication, trusting relationships, and joint design and evaluation of program objectives.
9. Prepare community partner supervisors to be effective in their role through a clear orientation, training as needed, and recognition of their contributions.
10. Adhere to the spirit and rules of the U.S. Department of Education's FWS legal requirements.

These principles are described in greater detail, with key points and specific campus examples, on the Compact Web site at www.compact.org/nationalworkstudy.html.

of incentives to encourage campuses to provide adequate resources for meeting—and exceeding—the current 7% mandate. When asked what resources would be necessary if the mandate was increased, the top three responses were additional staffing; financial assistance; and assistance locating or developing off-campus positions.

A significant number of participants indicated that, if necessary, they can rely on on-campus positions (such as those in the library or campus theater box office) to “inflate” the percentage of work-study dedicated to “community

service.” Other participants indicated they would refuse to report anything but “true” community service positions, even if this means they do not meet the 7% requirement.

These comments indicate that meeting or not meeting the percentage requirement does not necessarily reflect the relative strength or weakness of campus efforts in this area. Clear standards and definitions of “community service” were considered by many to be vital to increasing the use of community service work-study.

Lessons Learned from Related Efforts

From efforts to implement and strengthen service-learning and America Reads at colleges and universities around the country, certain key elements that contribute to success are well known. The following components have been critical to the success of these initiatives in recent years:

- Momentum and attention created through a national “movement”;
- Strong coalition leadership from influential and respected organizations and people;
- The availability of affordable resources, training, and professional development; and
- The waiver of the matching funds required by America Reads.

Policy Recommendations

When asked their overall policy recommendations, participants gave the following responses. The percentages represent the share of participants who gave each particular response. The responses were not mutually exclusive; participants were able to give as many responses as they wished.

- Provide financial assistance for administration of programs (57%)
- Clarify definition of community service / clarify guidelines for appropriate sites (30%)
- Create a mandate or incentive for all types of community service (not just work-study), or consider all forms of service when totaling a campus commitment, not just work-study (21%)
- Allow a flexible percentage (e.g., based on geographic location or institutional choice) (15%)
- Increase the mandated percentage (10%)
- Create incentives for participation (10%)

Based on the findings of these focus groups, Campus Compact created a set of policy recommendations to address these concerns and take advantage of opportunities.


1. Establish Community Service Work-Study Incentives

- **Create additional financial incentives for colleges that surpass the 7% mandated level.** Do not attempt to increase the mandate without providing additional financial support for the coordination and management of a high-quality program. Incentives might include additional funds for administration, staff, program innovations, or support for community partners. Funds could be designed to correspond with achievement of certain percentage levels.
- **Waive the current FWS matching requirement for all community service positions.** Extend the current waiver for literacy programs to include all community service work-study positions that meet certain criteria for appropriate and meaningful community service. While this does not increase the amount of federal work-study funds received by institutions, it decreases reporting and payment burdens and increases the attention on these positions.
- **Create a separate administrative allowance for community service work-study.** There are unique and time-consuming challenges associated with administration of a community service work-study program. In addition to the current administrative allowance for all federal work-study programs, a separate allowance specifically for administration of community service programs should be created. This would bring heightened awareness to the need for administration that goes above and beyond standard work-study management, such as development of off-campus positions, transportation, orientation, communication, and reflection.
- **Recognize best practices and achievement through a formal, visible collaborative program.** Create a system to recognize and celebrate extraordinary efforts in community service work-study. Annual awards or acknowledgement could be provided to institutions or individuals in areas such as best practices, leadership, and growth. Awards will be most meaningful if given by a coalition of respected organizations, such as Campus Compact, the Corporation for National and Community Service, or the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA).

2. Improve Current Community Service Work-Study Practice

- **Clarify definitions and reporting requirements.** In particular, specify more clearly the criteria for “on-campus” community service so that these positions truly embody the spirit of community service. This will also

help prevent inflation of the reported totals currently practiced by some campuses. Combine reporting on community service, America Reads, America Counts, and family literacy participation to lessen the amount of tracking paperwork required.

- **Create a grant program to develop and disseminate effective program models.** Models are truly needed so that campuses can not only learn the best practices for community service work-study, but also how to achieve them. Particularly needed are models that demonstrate working creatively with little or no additional ongoing funding to improve program quality. Grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service might be used to develop systems for coordinating campus resources, improving communication, facilitating community partnerships, evaluating programs, and coordinating FWS funding with AmeriCorps funding, VISTA personnel, Senior Corps volunteers and other national service resources. The most recent Learn and Serve request for proposals, issued in early 2003 by the Corporation of National and Community Service, included just such a fund. Applicants could apply for a specific pool of money to undertake innovative work, centered on deepening and extending the uses of community service work-study.
- **Provide inexpensive and accessible professional development for practitioners.** Focus-group comments made it clear that strong campus leadership for community service work-study programs is essential, but missing in some cases. Program leaders who understand the goals and best practices of community service work-study are much more likely to make the time to coordinate an effective program. Professional development might take the form of local, regional, or national meetings focused on the exchange of ideas and workshops on best practices; peer-based technical assistance; and access to written guidance. Campus Compact has been in conversation with NASFAA to provide workshops and sessions at upcoming NASFAA regional conferences.
- **Create additional resources to disseminate research and good practices.** Research on the effectiveness of community service work-study on students, institutions, and the community is unavailable. Organizing research to use in making a case for the benefits of community service work-study is important. 

Erin Bowley lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, and consults on community service work-study and campus civic engagement. She can be reached at erin@erinb.org.

This article is based on a longer report available at: www.compact.org/national/workstudy-index.html.