

Massachusetts: The Nation's First State of Service Background and Policy Platform, July 2010

OVERVIEW:

The MassINC Associate Board and AmeriCorps Alums Boston Chapter are working to make Massachusetts the nation's first official "State of Service." The initiative, which began as a series of state-wide events in the summer and fall of 2010 to engage a broad set of stakeholders, is particularly timely as the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act was signed into law just over one year ago. This legislation authorized the largest expansion of national service in America since Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. The idea of a State of Service builds off the hugely successful Cities of Service program, a bipartisan coalition of 101 mayors around the country who are working to develop comprehensive city-wide service plans and engage their citizens in solving local problems. States of Service will develop service plans and engage citizens state-wide. Given the rich history of service in Massachusetts communities, our goal is to lead the country in becoming the first official State of Service.

PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS:

The first in the series of state-wide discussions took place on June 8, 2010 with the generous support of the Highland Street Foundation, ZipCar and State Street. Over 100 individuals from across the state attended, representing stakeholders from higher education, program evaluation, government, international service, local service providers and area coalitions. We gathered feedback from attendees and used it to inform the draft policy platform that follows below. Two additional events are planned in the fall/winter of 2010. By April 2011 we aim to establish Massachusetts as the nation's first State of Service. Over the coming months we will:

- Solicit feedback on the policy platform from a diverse group of stakeholders
- Refine the policy platform
- Form a State of Service coalition comprised of all interested organizations in Massachusetts
- Formalize coalition members' commitment by having them sign on to the policy platform
- Get each of the three gubernatorial candidates to endorse the policy platform
- Turn the platform into state-level legislation, and have it passed in the first 100 days of the new governor's term

POLICY PLATFORM:

As the nation's first State of Service, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts pledges to:

Strengthen existing service-related policy:

- Create a cabinet-level Chief State Service Officer
- Identify clear areas for collaboration with the Social Innovation Compact
- Leverage service as a tool for community impact within government agencies
- Create financial incentives for organizations to support employee service initiatives
- Strengthen discussion among state-level policy makers, between states and cities, and among cities across the state

Promote stakeholder engagement:

- Create an online inventory of service providers, partners, and opportunities as well as forums for best practices, collaboration, and content expertise
- Encourage stakeholders—especially service providers and funders—to form partnerships and align priorities by issue area and across geographic locations
- Hold quarterly forums to engage stakeholders from across the service sector
- Engage small businesses as well as corporations in the service discussion, for example by encouraging them to offer incentives for employees to volunteer
- Build university partnerships to reward service with scholarships (e.g. "Give a Year Schools")
- Host a national State of Service Conference, with Massachusetts as the leading model

Conduct research:

- Find and support areas of alignment between international and domestic service
- Identify causes of silos within the service community and define strategies to break them down
- Measure the effects of service on participants as well as community/issue area

To provide feedback, ask questions or to get involved, please email americorpsalumboston@gmail.com or award@massinc.org.