

Intelligence

A Look at the Future of Volunteerism

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By: *Interview by Samantha Whitehorne*

Jackie Norris of the U.S. Corporation for National and Community Service sees changes coming in the volunteer landscape. Plus: Which U.S. cities have the most volunteers? A recent study reveals that and more.

As senior advisor to the Corporation for National and Community Service since June 2009, Jackie Norris has helped forward the agency's mission of citizenship, volunteerism, and service through its programs, which include Teach for America and AmeriCorps. With a president and administration promoting national service, it has been a busy first year on the job for Norris, but she still made time to speak with *Associations Now* before her Springtime UnPlugged session about the future of volunteering.

***Associations Now:* Can you address the importance and role of nonprofits and associations in accomplishing the work of the Corporation for National and Community Service?**

Jackie Norris: Both are facing a pretty significant burden right now. Fundraising is harder. But the best partner the government can have is a nonprofit. They're creative. They're more flexible. They're able to be on the ground and [be] compassionate and be tied to local community needs.

In some respects, we look at [associations and nonprofits] as our on-the-ground partners in terms of delivering service and solving problems.

What advice do you have for young professionals who are looking to volunteer time to their communities and organizations?

The best advice I have is don't give up. It's not as easy as it should be. ... The best thing to keep in mind is to look for the cause that is most interesting to you. You'll find that other people will engage with you. There's a social benefit to getting engaged. You meet friends and people with common interests and values and have fun at the same time.

The Serve America Act authorized many new programs. One of those is the Social Innovation Fund. Can you describe it and its potential impact for nonprofits?

I really think it's significant, even though it's a relatively small amount of money—\$50 million this year. It's a public/private vehicle to fund nonprofits that are implementing innovative ideas.

For instance, say you have this great nonprofit program in New Jersey. We ask, "How can we replicate it across the country?" The whole purpose is to find those innovative ideas and to invest the community in their success. It's not just the government giving money. The private sector has to match the money that's given.

You've been in your role at the Corporation for National and Community Service for almost a year now. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

Probably the one that I am most proud of is the broad United We Serve effort. The focus is to try to engage people from all walks of life in solving problems in their own communities. We've got Serve.gov, which is an opportunity for people to go and type in their zip code and find a local community opportunity. What we're doing is trying to make sure people are better connecting with their communities.

How do you think volunteering in the United States will change in the next few years?

I really think social media is going to be the driver of volunteerism of the future. When you think about it, people can really create a revolution from their couch just with a computer and social media tools. The trend will be that social media will be a hub pulling more people together, and you'll also see more fundraising and greater potential for volunteering.

The most important message to nonprofits and associations that aren't using technology is to get out of your comfort zone. If you don't use social media, you need to figure out how to. It's how you are going to pull new people in. Technology is definitely going to broaden volunteerism.

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Volunteer Snapshot

In [Volunteering for America 2010](#), the Corporation for National and Community Service surveyed 60,000 households about their volunteer efforts. Here's a quick glimpse at the findings. For more information, visit www.volunteeringinamerica.gov.

2009 Volunteer Rate: **26.8%**

2008 Volunteer Rate: **26.4%**

Number of Volunteers, 2009: **63.4 million**

Number of Volunteers, 2008: **61.8 million**

State With Highest Volunteer Rate (2007-2009): **Utah (44.2%)**

Large City With Highest Volunteer Rate (2007-2009): **Minneapolis (37.4%)**

Mid-Size City With Highest Volunteer Rate (2007-2009): **Provo, Utah (63.6%)**