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# Inclusive National and Community Service: Bringing Together Service and Disability Communities

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# Inclusive National and Community Service: Bringing together Service and Disability Communities

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## Summary/Abstract

National service and volunteer programs, seeking to reflect the diversity of their communities, are increasing the participation of individuals with disabilities as members, volunteers, and leaders and working to ensure each individual has a meaningful service experience. In order to support their inclusive efforts, NSIP brings together the national service and disability communities at a local, state, and national level. Through partnership building, strategic planning, and resource sharing, there have been measureable increases in numbers of service participants with disabilities and the quality of their experience.

## Goals and Objectives

The Serve America Act (SAA), the legislation that authorizes CNCS charges service programs to “collaborate with organizations with demonstrated expertise in supporting and accommodating individuals with disabilities” (Serve America Act of 2009). This collaboration aligns with CNCS’ current strategic plan to “strengthen outreach efforts in underserved communities and to implement best practices that ensure a powerful service experience” (CNCS Strategic Plan, 2011). NSIP builds partnerships to:

1. Develop and sustain local, state and national programs’ capacity to embrace inclusive practices.
2. Work with partners, programs and commissions to recruit and support veterans, including veterans with disabilities, as active service members in structured volunteer and service experiences,
3. Create strong partnerships that allow and encourage sharing of resources and innovative, promising practices which will result in a welcoming and inclusive service environment for individuals with disabilities,
4. Demonstrate that the number of individuals with disabilities actively serving in CNCS programs is growing, and those individuals have a meaningful service experience,
5. Build the capacity of local, state, and national programs to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and
6. Encourage more members with disabilities to use their Education Award and successfully transition from service to post-secondary education or employment.

## Approaches and Methods

1. **Developing partnerships between national service and the disability community**
  - a. National service programs working with AUCD’s 67 UCEDs to access training and technical assistance.
  - b. Developing relationships with local, state, and national Independent Living Centers (ILCs).
  - c. Entering into contracts with state executive offices on disability.
  - d. Building ties with community organizations that support individuals with disabilities.
  - e. Developing formal and informal partnerships with veterans organizations.
  - f. Creating partnerships with organizations that serve disenfranchised populations, basing these partnerships on common needs of the disability community and the representatives of the other traditionally underrepresented populations.
2. **Strategic planning with statewide inclusion teams**
  - a. Teams meeting on a regular basis to both provide support for disability inclusion to the national service community, and promote national service opportunities to the disability community.
  - b. Teams from around the country meeting periodically to share promising practices, examine national priorities and collaborate.
3. **Resource sharing**
  - a. Conducting a literature review with Felicia Wilczenski to collate service learning resources.
  - b. Answering technical assistance questions and sharing resources that address the needs of local, state and national programs.
4. **Building national networks**
  - a. Conducting Disability Coordinator Affinity Group calls which encourage participants to exchange promising practices and gain knowledge that helps them in their state’s efforts.
  - b. Building partnerships among state service commissions in both formal and informal capacities.
  - c. Convening bi-annual national events that bring together leaders in the service and disability communities.
  - d. Collaborating with national partners to develop and implement cutting-edge practices in inclusion.
5. **Partnering to Recruit Veterans with Disabilities**
  - a. Partnering with CTAT at Denver Options to conduct interviews and discussion groups with veterans and current service members.
6. **Virtual Partnerships**
  - a. Collaborating with Second Life organizations on their inclusive needs in virtual worlds. This includes improving access to Second Life and access to volunteering and social communities.

## Results/Impact

NSIP has served as a broker between the national service and disability communities, and has been instrumental in forging national, state, and local partnerships. Examples of results of these partnerships include:

1. **Developing partnerships between national service and the disability community**
  - a. 48 states have formed contractual or more informal working relationships with one or more UCED.
  - b. 17 states have formed contractual relationships with local, state, and national independent living centers (ILCs).
  - c. 18 state service commissions have entered into contracts with state executive offices on disability. These partnerships have enabled commissions to participate in policy development relating to service and disability issues.
  - d. Every state has entered into many formal and informal agreements with disability organizations. These partnerships have been fundamental in increasing inclusion in national service programs.
  - e. 38 states have formed creative partnerships with organizations that serve disenfranchised populations.
2. **Strategic planning with statewide inclusion teams**
  - a. 26 states have formed, or are in the process of forming, inclusion teams.
3. **Resource sharing**
  - a. In 2010, NSIP answered over 2,289 technical assistance questions to help build the capacity of the field and share resources.
  - b. NSIP, in collaboration with Felicia Wilczenski, developed a website showcasing a literature review of inclusive service learning resources.
4. **Building national networks**
  - a. NSIP conducted 11 monthly Disability Coordinator Affinity Group calls in 2010.
  - b. 8 state commissions have worked with other state commissions in both formal and informal capacities.
  - c. Over the past ten years, NSIP has held over 15 national events focused on service and inclusion.
5. **Partnering to Recruit Veterans with Disabilities**
  - a. In partnership with CTAT at Denver Options, we conducted
    - i. Interviews with veterans who are current or former AmeriCorps or other national service volunteers.
    - ii. Discussion groups with active duty soldiers from the Wounded Transition Units (WTU) and veterans.
  - b. 12 states have developed formal and informal partnerships with veterans organizations.
6. **Virtual Partnerships**
  - a. Participated with TechSoup’s NonProfit Commons to generate community solutions for disability inclusion and resources in Second Life.
  - b. Partnered with Virtual Ability Island, a Second Life nonprofit organization.

## Conclusion/Next Steps

NSIP’s goal with these partnerships has been to strengthen the capacity of CNCS grantees to manage and implement service infrastructures that promote, recruit, supervise, accommodate and support fully inclusive service environments. Next steps include:

- Continuing to work with partners on the local, state and national level to maximize the network of service and disability organizations.
- Increasing our outreach to and collaboration with veterans with disabilities.
- Consulting with leaders in the national service and disability communities to identify policies, procedures and promising practices that will support the increased inclusion of individuals with disabilities in national and community service.

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## Additional Partnerships, Information and/or Contacts

**Corporation for National and Community Service** [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)  
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The National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) is a training and technical assistance provider on disability inclusion, under a cooperative agreement (#08TAHMA001) from Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).