

A PRE-PROPOSAL

for the creation of the



Kansas Corps

Kansans Serving Kansans

Submitted to:

Christine Downey-Schmidt, Chair
Kansas Board of Regents
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“If it be true no man should live for himself alone, we may safely assert that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education and to qualify himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good.”

-President McKeen, 1802
Bowdoin College, Maine

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

The proposed *Kansas Corps* is a pool of student volunteers from Kansas colleges and universities who serve the public service needs of the state of Kansas. The *Kansas Corps* will serve as a coordinating agency that will link the various community service and volunteerism programs from Kansas higher education institutions for the direct purpose of serving the citizens of Kansas. With a single phone call, this group of college student volunteers could be mobilized to provide disaster relief, social services and/or community development assistance to any region of the state. Nearly all of the 37 Kansas public institutions of higher learning have some form of a public service/volunteerism program that is designed to match college students with the local community. The purpose of this new initiative is to create a network of these various college programs that, when needed, could be called into action to serve the state.

Currently, Kansas universities, community colleges and technical schools operate in environments that sometimes can hinder intrastate cooperation. School loyalty, silo thinking, and organizational cultures and traditions restrict collaboration. Furthermore, understandable competition for students, faculty and resources also limit collaborative efforts. The *Kansas Corps* creates an opportunity for these institutions to work directly with one another and other state agencies to provide valuable public services.

The goal of the *Kansas Corps* is twofold. First, this new initiative would provide a network of volunteers on a large scale to address either local or statewide public issues. For example, *Kansas Corps* could work closely with the Kansas Department of Emergency Management to provide needed services due to a tornado or other natural disaster; could be mobilized around a particular social service need; or these college volunteers could link together to address a particular community development assistance program in Kansas. Secondly, and equally important, the *Kansas Corps* would promote citizenship and civic engagement among the participating college students. This unique program would be a training ground for students to become more civically engaged and inspire their passion for social responsibility and active participation. Therefore, the *Kansas Corps* would create a new generation of Kansans who empower themselves and have the skills and capabilities to act on behalf of the greater good.

This new initiative is not focusing on creating a new public service and volunteer program, but rather linking and building upon established programs to better serve the state. Unlike many other Kansas Board of Regents initiatives that require substantial funding from the Kansas legislature, this program seeks to create new structures and processes that establish a more collective-interest focus among college volunteer programs. Finally, *Kansas Corps* will serve as a platform in building and improving relationships between the state's institutions of higher education and the communities of Kansas.

THE CALL FOR KANSANS TO SERVE

Kansas has a long history of its citizens volunteering themselves for the betterment of others. Nearly every community in Kansas was built by volunteers who constructed civic buildings, schools, churches, and even their neighbors' homes. In the 20th century, Kansans continued to serve and aid their fellow citizens. From the floods of 1951 and tornados in Udall (1955) and Andover (1991), to providing basic human services to those in need, Kansans were there for each other. Even recent events in Greensburg and southeast Kansas again illustrate the importance and role that community service can and must play. Government as well as the private sector can only do so much. Kansans of all ages must continually be encouraged to serve their fellow citizens.

The *Kansas Corps* initiative proposes to focus on three primary areas of public need. Structures, processes and networks will be designed to address the following public service issues:

- Disaster Relief Services. College student volunteers would be mobilized in large numbers to provide a variety of emergency services during or following a local or state-wide disaster. Students could be trained to address events ranging from natural disasters to terrorism.
- Social Services. College student volunteers would be called to assist with the development and/or operations of social service programs. For example, volunteers could be involved in the issues of homelessness, literacy, child development, or elderly services.
- Community Development Assistance. College student volunteers would be assembled to assist Kansas communities with a variety of community development needs. College students could help construct playgrounds and public parks, assist with downtown renovation, or provide valuable resources and services to economically depressed regions of Kansas.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

At this early stage of development, there is no consensus on what formal structure or program needs to be developed to implement the *Kansas Corps* concept. Options vary from a very loose network of college service programs with little supporting resources to a much more structured program with defined processes, procedures, and extensive support systems. Key decisions in the planning process about the program operations will likely dictate the eventual program design. For example, will *Kansas Corps* members volunteer several hours per year or will there be an expectation of thousands of volunteer hours by corps members? Will participating colleges and universities be responsible for volunteer recruitment, training, transportation, and other logistical resources, or will a new centralized entity need to be created to provide these important services? Future planning will need to address these issues and establish the most appropriate structure for Kansans.

THE CASE OF PENNSYLVANIA

Our research this past year found few samples or models to assist us in our planning. The Florida Alliance for Student Service, Montana Raise Your Voice and the Michigan Campus Compact's Partnership Summit do provide us with some limited examples in the areas of collaborative public service. However, one possible model may come from the state of Pennsylvania. In 2003, College Misericordia, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Pennsylvania Campus Compact and the State Office of Homeland Security developed a collaborative program called *Ready Campus*. This initiative created a partnership among Pennsylvania colleges and universities and communities designed to strengthen preparation for response to emergencies through the use of campus facilities, training campus volunteers, and providing students with service-learning opportunities to prepare them to be crisis-ready civic leaders of the future. While this initiative involved only ten schools and was limited in scope and purpose, it does provide us with valuable insight into our planning process.

PLANNING PROCESS AND PLANNING TEAM

This document is labeled a "pre-proposal" which briefly outlines a conceptual idea. It is a starting point that will need further defined and be transformed into a more comprehensive and detailed plan. This pre-proposal further recommends that a planning task force or committee be established to examine the various program models, possible structures and operational details. It is our hope that a full proposal will be developed and will include a series of recommendations for the Kansas Board of Regents.

The idea behind the *Kansas Corps* was actually born in the spring of 2007 when ten Kansas colleges and universities came together to discuss various issues related to their community service programs. At this "day of sharing" mini-conference, administrators, faculty and students discussed the idea of collaborative work and the *Kansas Corps* concept. The schools that participated in this meeting include: Butler Community College, Kansas State University, North Central Kansas Technical College, Fort Hays State University, Pratt Community College, Cowley College, Kansas State University-Salina, Emporia State University, Washburn University, and Wichita State University.

This past summer, Curt Brungardt (Center for Civic Leadership), Mary Marston (Kansas Campus Compact), Shelby Hoytal (Kansas Office for Community Service), and college students Kelli Stout (KU) and Kelsey Colglazier (FHSU) moved the idea of the *Kansas Corps* from an abstract concept to this pre-proposal. This small team conducted valuable research and explored program options. We believe it is now time to expand this planning team and narrow the focus of the planning process. First, we call on the Kansas Board of Regents to develop a planning team, including representatives from Kansas colleges and universities and elected and non-elected government officials. Secondly, we ask that this team be charged with the task of researching and exploring this idea in more depth and creating a detailed plan.

PILOT PROJECT

In addition to calling for the development of a comprehensive proposal, we would also like to encourage dozens of college students from several Kansas colleges and universities to participate in a “pilot project” testing the concept. Efforts are currently underway to identify interested schools and potential service projects. A possible date may be the 2008 National Youth Service Day in April. As details are finalized, schools will be contacted for participation interest.

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