

This brief historical time line highlights some of the most important dates in the development of service-learning.

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| 1903 | Cooperative Education Movement founded at the University of Cincinnati |
| Circa 1905 | William James, John Dewey developing intellectual foundations to service-based learning |
| 1910 | American philosopher William James envisions non-military national service in his essay "The Moral Equivalent of War" |
| Circa 1915 | Some Folk Schools in Appalachia become two- and four-year colleges with work, service, and learning connected |
| 1933-1942 | Through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), created by Franklin D. Roosevelt, millions of young people serve terms of 6 to 18 months to help restore the nation's parks, revitalize the economy, and support their families and themselves |
| 1935 | Work Projects Administration established (needed public work for people who needed jobs) |
| 1944 | The GI Bill links service and education, offering Americans educational opportunity in return for service to their country |
| 1960s | The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program are developed to engage older Americans in the work of improving the nation |
| 1961 | President John F. Kennedy establishes the Peace Corps, with authorizing legislation approved by Congress on September 22, 1961 |
| 1964 | As part of the "War on Poverty," President Lyndon B. Johnson creates VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a National Teacher Corps, the Job Corps, and University Year of Action. VISTA provides opportunities for Americans to serve full-time to help thousands of low-income communities. White House Fellows program established |
| 1965 | College work-study programs established |
| 1966 | Urban Corps emerged, funded with federal work-study dollars |
| 1966-1967 | "Service-learning" phrase used to describe a TVA-funded project in East Tennessee with Oak Ridge Associated Universities, linking students and faculty with tributary area development organizations |
| 1968 | National Service Secretariat Conference on National Service held in Washington, D.C |

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| 1969 | Atlanta Service-Learning Conference (sponsors included Southern Regional Education Board, U.S. Dept. HEW, City of Atlanta, Atlanta Urban Corps, Peace Corps, and VISTA) |
| 1970 | The Youth Conservation Corps engages 38,000 people age 14 to 18 in summer environmental programs |
| 1971 | White House Conference on Youth report full of calls for linking service and learning. Also, the National Center for Public Service Internships was established, and the Society for Field Experience Education (these two merged in 1978 to become the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education) |
| Circa 1971 | National Student Volunteer Program (became the National Center for Service-Learning in 1979) established. Published Synergist, a journal promoting linking service and learning |
| 1976 | California Governor Jerry Brown establishes the California Conservation Corps, the first non-federal youth corps at the state level |
| 1978 | The Young Adult Conservation Corps creates small conservation corps in the states with 22,500 participants age 16 to 23 |
| 1979 | "Three Principles of Service-Learning" published in the Synergist |
| 1980s | National service efforts are launched at the grassroots level, including the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (1984) and Campus Compact (1985), which help mobilize service programs in higher education; the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (1985), which helps replicate youth corps in states and cities; National Youth Leadership Council (1982), which helps to prepare future leaders; and Youth Service America (1985), through which many young people are given a chance to serve |
| 1981 | National Center for Service-Learning for Early Adolescents established |
| 1989 | Wingspread Principles of Good Practice in Service-Learning written-more than seventy organizations collaborate to produce the ten principles |
| 1989-1990 | President George Bush creates the Office of National Service in the White House and the Points of Light Foundation to foster volunteering |
| 1990 | Congress Passes, and President Bush signs, the National and Community Service Act of 1990. The legislation authorizes grants to schools to support service-learning and demonstration grants for national service programs to youth corps, nonprofits, and colleges and universities. Learn and Serve America established (as Serve-America) |

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| 1992 | The Maryland State Board of Education adopts mandatory service requirement which becomes effective in 1993 and affects the graduating class of 1997 and beyond |
| 1993 | Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development endorse the importance of linking service with learning |
| Sept. 1993 | President Bill Clinton signs the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, creating AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National Service. The legislation unites Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, VISTA and Learn and Serve America into one independent federal agency |
| 1994 | Congress passes the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994, charging the Corporation for National Service with taking the lead in organizing Martin Luther King Day as a day of service. The Stanford Service-Learning Institute created. The Ford Foundation/United Negro College Fund Community Service Partnership Project (a 10-college program linking direct service and learning) begun |
| 1995 | Service-Learning network on the internet, via the University of Colorado Peace Studies Center |
| April 1997 | The Presidents' Summit for America's Future, chaired by General Colin Powell, brings together President Clinton, former Presidents Bush, Ford, and Carter, and Mrs. Reagan to recognize and expand the role of AmeriCorps and other service programs in meeting the needs of America's youth |
| 1997 | Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education published Wingspread Declaration Renewing the Civic Mission of the American University published |
| 2001 | First International Conference on Service-Learning Research held Wingspread conference on student civic engagement held |
| 2002 | The USA Freedom Corps, a coordinating council and White House office, was launched to help Americans answer President George W. Bush's nationwide call to service |
| 2003 | President Bush created the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation to find ways to recognize the valuable contributions volunteers are making in our Nation. The council created the President's Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service |