

April 2, 2024

The Honorable Gene Pelowski, Chair
Higher Education Finance and Policy
491 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Pelowski:

Enclosed is the final report on the feasibility of creating and implementing a Minnesota service initiative as required by *Minnesota Session Laws Chapter 41, Article 1, Subd 43*. The report discusses program design, implementation challenges and recommendations, outcomes, and the feasibility of scaling the program over time. The Iowa Minnesota Campus Compact authored the feasibility study report.

Some key takeaways from the report include:

- Crafting a service program for the next generation of college students has the potential to create multiple benefits
 - 1 hour of volunteer time = \$34.47 to the state
 - Could focus on workforce development priority areas
 - Leveraging colleges would span an urban/rural divide
 - COVID-19 has depleted resources at colleges previously available for civic engagement activities. This would help restore those activities
 - Service programs use high impact practices (community-based learning and internships) which can increase college student retention and completion rates, increase academic success, and overall engagement. This impact is particularly beneficial for students from underserved backgrounds
- A service program's programming and curricula focus on increasing college student civic engagement using a hybrid of two high-impact practices: community-based learning and internships. Proposals from campuses should be evaluated to determine the extent to which key elements of these practices are included.
 - Eight key elements of the included high impact practices that are known to maximize student benefit include:
 1. Meaningful experiences to challenge students
 2. Investment of appropriate time and effort yields a much more meaningful experience for both students and community partners.
 3. Shared work via interaction and collaboration: Opportunities for interaction and collaboration can be increased by utilizing a cohort model where students learn alongside one another. Project-based experiences also allow for students to engage with others toward a shared outcome, often resulting in more meaningful and impactful work.
 4. Intern managers: National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) recommends hiring intern managers where possible so that frequent, timely and constructive feedback is possible. Bi-directional feedback from the student to the organization also increases student satisfaction and engagement in positions as they are often looking for meaningful ways to have their voices and opinions heard.
 5. Reflection is a key component to student learning and development as it allows students to process their experiences and apply it to learning goals both professionally and academically.

6. Exposure to diversity to increase collaboration skills: Engaging with individuals across difference can increase empathy and understanding. It also helps prepare students for collaborative work where they are likely to engage with individuals who have different worldviews and lived experiences.
7. Demonstration or presentation: This can help them translate their experience and articulate transferable skills which is useful when writing a resume and preparing for job interviews.
8. Paid service commitments: Crafting service experiences that are paid, and even offering scholarships along with pay, will help to recruit participants from underrepresented populations, fill critical employment roles, and result in needed workforce diversification.

The report will be available online through the Legislative Reference Library. Feel free to contact myself or the report authors if you have questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dennis Olson", written in a cursive style.

Dennis Olson
Commissioner

Enclosure



Feasibility Study:
**Creating and Implementing a Minnesota Service
Initiative to Increase College Student Civic
Engagement**

Prepared by Iowa and Minnesota Campus Compact

01/05/2024

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About the Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding more than \$224 million annually in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending eligible colleges, universities and career schools in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

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Feasibility Study:

Creating and Implementing a Minnesota Service Initiative to
Increase College Student Civic Engagement

Final Report

Submitted to the Office of Higher Education

by

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January 2024

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Introduction

Crafting a service program for the next generation of college students has the potential to create multiple benefits for the state of Minnesota and its communities, for higher education institutions, and, primarily, for the college students themselves.

Investing in a service program creates support for communities in a post-COVID world where many non-profit and public sector organizations have either struggled to maintain funding or are losing COVID-relief funding offered as a result of the pandemic. Investment from the state would infuse resources into these communities in a way that has a tangible return on investment for non-profits. In the 2023 Value of Volunteer Time Report, each hour a volunteer served equates to \$34.47 in the State of Minnesota (Independent Sector, 2023). Additionally, a service program could focus on identified workforce priorities in sectors and/or regions across the state. Utilizing higher education institutions as a vehicle allows the benefits to span the state and cross the urban/rural divide. All Minnesotans would benefit from a new generation of civic-minded college graduates with the skills and experience to build more equitable and resilient communities across the state.

Institutions of Higher Education would also benefit from a service program supported by the state. Much like non-profit organizations, higher education institutions are feeling the financial shifts of a post-COVID reality. More specifically, an extensive feedback session completed by Iowa & Minnesota Campus Compact of more than 30 2-year, 4-year, and private institutions of higher education in Minnesota indicated a distinct loss of budget and human resources in their community and civic engagement functional areas. Respondents noted recent shifts in institutional priorities and resources away from functional areas focused on civic and community engagement toward functional areas focused on student access and success. A new service program would significantly bolster support for civic and community engagement in a time of resource depletion and offer increased opportunities to meaningfully re-engage with their local communities.

Finally, service programs focused on increasing civic engagement are considered High Impact Practices (HIPs). These types of programs are known to have a direct impact on important measures of

success in higher education, such as retention (Brownell & Swaner, 2010). Importantly, HIPs are known to increase all student participants' academic success and levels of engagement (Kuh, 2008, Finley & McNair, 2013). However, research shows that participation is particularly beneficial for students from underserved backgrounds (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2008). According to one national study, when high impact practices are "done well" (Kuh, 2008, p. 20), gaps in equity between students from underserved backgrounds and their traditionally advantaged peers are minimized (Finley & McNair, 2013). As such, a service program designed to produce maximum benefit for students should carefully consider best practices for student engagement.

Best Practices for Students in Service Programs

A service initiative focused on increasing college student civic engagement is in many ways a hybrid of two high-impact practices: Community-Based Learning and Internships. As such, it is useful to consider best practices for both types of programs. The following list is structured around the key elements of high impact practices that are known to maximize student benefit (Kuh and O'Donnell, 2013) with important additions from the National Association for Colleges and Employers' (NACE) list of best practices for internship programs (National Association for Colleges and Employers [NACE], n.d.). The list includes examples that elucidate key considerations for building a robust service initiative for college students.

Performance Expectations

Meaningful experiences challenge students to achieve at levels above their current level or ability. This is especially true when HIPs mirror real work experiences. Critical decisions related to this point are whether or not positions are curated with student choice in mind (which is known to increase student buy-in), and whether or not the focus of the program is direct service positions, project-based opportunities, or a mix of both. Direct service can be more cost effective from a staffing perspective as it is less burdensome to manage and the outcomes are more clearly defined. However, project-based internships allow for more opportunity for students to utilize problem solving skills and connect to classroom learning.

Time and Effort

Investing appropriate time and effort yields a much more meaningful experience for both students and community partners. Depth and breadth of experience should be considered as they allow students to have more complete experiences and to both learn and practice acquired skills. Most educational institutions require a minimum of 120-150 hours of work per earned academic credit. Work done during the summer is often over a shorter period of time, but in a more time intensive format (often 40 hours per week) while work during the academic year is generally completed in smaller weekly increments (8-12 hours per week) to allow for an increased academic course load.

Interaction and Collaboration

NACE identifies problem solving skills and the ability to work as a team as the two most highly sought after skills that employers seek on a candidate's resume. Working in partnership with other students as well as with community members provides opportunities to work across lines of difference and engage in collaborative problem solving. Opportunities for interaction and collaboration can be increased by utilizing a cohort model where students learn alongside one another. Project-based experiences also allow for students to engage with others toward a shared outcome, often resulting in more meaningful and impactful work.

Feedback

Feedback is defined as the assessment of a student's performance, relative to learning goals or learning outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022). Feedback is needed to increase student engagement and assist them in connecting their work in the community with classroom learning as well as to their future careers. For this reason, NACE recommends hiring intern managers where possible or at the very least identifying sufficient staffing so that frequent, timely and constructive feedback is possible. Bi-directional feedback from the student to the organization also increases student satisfaction and engagement in positions as they are often looking for meaningful ways to have their voices and opinions heard.

Reflection

Reflection is a key component to student learning and development as it allows students to process their experiences and apply it to learning goals both professionally and academically. Through reflection, students can identify skills learned during their experiences and can also develop a deeper, more complex understanding of the world around them. Offering professional development opportunities on key skills, discussing lived experiences with other participants, and drawing connections between current work and future goals not only prepares students for the world of work but also prepares them to be engaged civically and in their communities.

Experiences with Diversity

Engaging with individuals across difference can increase empathy and understanding. It also helps prepare students for collaborative work where they are likely to engage with individuals who have different worldviews and lived experiences. Offering a variety of service experiences and encouraging collaborative work increase the likelihood of experiences with diversity. Coupling this practice with high-quality reflection and professional development opportunities also allows students to process these experiences through a lens of curiosity and learning and prevents reinforcing previously held biases or assumptions.

Demonstration or Presentation

The opportunity for students to present their experience allows for other members of the organization or the public to learn about their work. Presentations or other demonstrations of proficiency also allow students to showcase their competence and integrate learning. This can help them translate their experience and articulate transferable skills which is useful when writing a resume and preparing for job interviews.

Pay and Scholarships

In 2018, NACE released a position statement which takes a strong stance against unpaid internships as well as utilizing academic credit in lieu of compensation since students pay for credits. Unpaid internships and internships that utilize academic credit as a stand-alone benefit of participation are

more common in the non-profit and public sector than in the for-profit sector. Taking on an unpaid internship or service placement is much more difficult and sometimes impossible for a student who must earn an income while earning their degree. For this reason, participating in an unpaid internship or other unpaid opportunities is much harder, and often impossible, for students who cannot forgo a paycheck for a significant period. Crafting service experiences that are paid, and even offering scholarships along with pay, will help to recruit interest from underrepresented populations, fill critical employment roles, and result in needed workforce diversification (NACE, 2022).

Models for Consideration

The following set of three program models illuminate practical applications of best practices in student service programs and public service internship experiences. Programs are inclusive of local and national programs and were chosen intentionally to include a diverse array of program designs. They showcase various models, staffing, professional development requirements, and funding structures for consideration.

#CaliforniansForAll College Corp

Program Overview

The #CaliforniansForAll College Corp (#CCC) was created with the goal of creating debt free pathways to college while engaging students in solving community problems across the state. It is administered by the state service commission, California Volunteers, and partners with 46 college campuses to support 3,250 students on a yearly basis. Participating campuses include state and private institutions as well as community colleges. Eligible students must be enrolled as a full-time, undergraduate student at a partner campus and must demonstrate financial need. Financial need includes students eligible for state and federal scholarships or those who need to borrow student loans or work to meet educational costs. Participants must also be a citizen, legal permanent resident, or be a AB 540 CA Dream Act student.

Program Model

Students participating in #CCC complete 450 hours of service over the course of a year, primarily at one community partner host site. Partner campuses are responsible for recruiting host sites and working with students to acquire a service position. Host sites typically fall into one of three focus areas: food insecurity, K-12 learning, and climate action. A small subset of sites (20%) focus on other issues, most commonly homelessness, justice, and health. Nearly 800 community partners are engaged in the program hosting a minimum of 2 students each. Campuses may develop these partnerships individually or as part of a three or more campus consortium linked by a common geographical area. Individual campuses must enroll a minimum of 100 students while consortiums must collectively enroll 200 students. Campuses may also offer academic credit for these experiences and determine their own parameters for doing so.

Funding Structure

#CCC is funded using a combination of federal AmeriCorps funds and allocations from the State of California. In its first year, funds from the Federal Recovery Act were also used to launch and support the program. Students receive a \$7,000 living allowance and \$3,000 AmeriCorps Segal Education Award for participating in the program. Because of AmeriCorps regulations, students with status under the Dream Act are paid entirely with state funds. They receive a living allowance of \$5,500 and a \$4,500 Education Award. The Education Award for these students comes from a fund called the California Dream Act Service Incentive. Regardless of whether students are paid through both state and federal dollars or only state dollars, the total financial benefit is \$10,000 for participants.

Additionally, participating campuses are awarded \$8,000 per enrolled student to support their administrative costs. Campuses may also choose to allocate some of this funding to community host sites, particularly if those sites are hosting a large number of their students.

Staffing

A large majority of administrative support funding is spent on staffing. In addition to staff hired to support students and develop partnerships, campuses are also encouraged to use the administrative funds they receive to hire financial aid staff. Financial aid staff can provide specialized advice to students

regarding working this program into their financial aid package. Campus staff are also responsible for completing the administrative requirements of the federal AmeriCorps program which includes ensuring students successfully complete forms and reports, background checks, required trainings, and timesheets. They also work with partners in tracking community-based performance measures.

California Volunteers oversees the state funding and employs a team of 4 regional portfolio managers to provide support and training to campuses, particularly around the AmeriCorps reporting requirements. They are currently looking to increase the number of portfolio managers on staff in order to adequately support their campus partners. Additionally, a platform called America Learns is used to aid in tracking, reporting, and sharing data between the state commission and individual campuses.

Professional Development

California Serves requires that all campuses have on-campus offerings related to cohort building and professional development. There are no specific requirements for what these trainings must entail, but the goal is to build community among student participants and opportunities for reflection and mentorship. The commission also hosts trainings virtually and regionally that are required for students to attend. These trainings are primarily facilitated by a contracted non-profit organization with an emphasis on bridge building and dialogue.

Urban Scholars Program

Program Overview

The Urban Scholars Program is a summer internship program facilitated by the City of Minneapolis for students interested in pursuing careers in the public sector. Created in response to a 2012 resolution that sought to support employment equity in Minnesota, the goal is to create a diverse and equitable workforce by funding internships which are historically unpaid or underpaid. There are approximately 100 participants in this full-time, 12 week internship experience. To be eligible, individuals must be enrolled and in good standing at an accredited college, university, graduate school or law school or have completed a degree within the last year. Applicants must have completed at least one academic year and must be eligible to work in the United States. Selection of applicants is based on four

qualifications: Cultural Competency, Altruism, Teamwork and Collaboration, and Resilience and Adaptability.

Program Model

Urban Scholars are matched with a public sector organization that is located in the Twin Cities area. Students are matched with participating host sites based on career goals, professional and academic interest and skill set. Examples of current host sites include Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota, the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, St. Paul Parks and Recreation, the Metropolitan Council, and the State of Minnesota. Students work in a project-based capacity throughout the course of their internship. Each position is unique and based on organizational needs, but often include responsibilities such as working with data, doing research, guiding workshops and outreach, and projects related to communication.

Funding Structure

Individuals participating in the Urban Scholars Program are paid at least \$15 an hour. The program is funded by the City of Minneapolis.

Professional Development

In addition to work at their internship site, Urban Scholars participate in the Urban Scholars Leadership Institute (USLI). USLI provides training through speakers and panelists from across the region who work in the public sector addressing topics like networking, time management, conflict resolution, and teamwork. Students are placed in small group cohorts and attend meetings together. These small groups encourage active participation and provide opportunities to practice skills like public speaking. These trainings occur weekly throughout the summer and are held in person in Minneapolis.

Next Steps Program

Program Overview

The Next Steps Program is offered by the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND). PHENND is a membership consortium based out of University of Pennsylvania for higher education institutions in the greater Philadelphia area. Currently there are

approximately 25 institutions in this network with six choosing to participate in the Next Steps Program. In total, approximately 60 students participate on a yearly basis. The program goal is to foster retention and success for college students through community service, mentorship, and leadership development. Corps members complete 300 hours of service over the course of one calendar year while also participating in training and mentorship activities that count toward their hour total. To be eligible, students must attend one of PHENND's participating campuses and be Pell Eligible or a first generation student and must be a rising Sophomore or Junior. Students must also be eligible for federal work study on their campus.

Program Model

Campuses participating in the Next Steps Program are responsible for recruiting students to participate in the program. They work collaboratively with Next Steps staff members to secure a community-based work study position where they complete direct service over the course of the year. In addition to direct service work, all Corps members serve as mentors to two first-year students on their respective campus. They are expected to meet with their mentee matches on a weekly basis to provide support and mentorship. This mentoring relationship serves as the common bond and reporting measure for all corps members.

Funding Structure

PHENND works with the AmeriCorps program to offer a Segal Education Award to all participants upon completion of their award. Students do not receive a living stipend through AmeriCorps, but do receive hourly pay through the Federal Work Study (FWS) Program. Individual institutions determine pay rate for student positions based on their own policies. Participating campuses pay a yearly fee of \$5,000 to participate in the Next Steps Program. These funds are used to cover administrative costs and to fund full-time project leaders.

Staffing

Full-time project leaders are recruited to serve at each participating campus. These leaders receive a full-time living allowance and education award through AmeriCorps. These individuals are often recent

graduates who can serve as near-peer mentors and can assist with supporting and organizing members. Additionally, PHENDDD has one full-time staff person designated to coordinate the Next Steps program and serve as a liaison to campuses. This individual is also primarily responsible for all AmeriCorps reporting and hour tracking.

Professional Development

Next Step Corps members participate in professional development experiences on their respective campuses. These are typically delivered in the form of speakers and workshops and are organized by the full-time project leader serving on the campus. These professional development hours count toward the members 300 hour total requirement.

Design of Feasibility Study

Because of the many stakeholders impacted by this project, our team met with a variety of individuals who provided valuable feedback and input that have shaped our recommendations. Initial meetings were held with existing programs that served as potential models and guides. These organizations included the #CaliforniansForAll College Corps program (#CCC) through the California Volunteers Service Commission, the Next Steps AmeriCorps Program offered by the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development, and the Urban Scholars Program hosted by the Civil Rights Department for the City of Minneapolis. Additional subject matter expertise was gathered from conversations with Janna Pennington, consultant for America's Service Commissions, focused on building relationships between AmeriCorps and Higher Education, and Meghan Flores from the Office of Higher Education to discuss financial aid considerations. Sandy Pulles and Stacey Scherschligt from Serve Minnesota also met with our team regularly to consult on AmeriCorps requirements and provide additional insight and support.

In addition to the meetings listed above, seven meetings were held during the week of December 11th to gather feedback from stakeholders including campus staff and faculty, current college students, and non-profit organizations. More than 40 individuals participated in these conversations which included sessions focused on specific stakeholder groups. The following groups were convened:

- Staff and Faculty from 2-Year Colleges
- Staff and Faculty from 4-Year institutions in the MNSCU system
- Staff and Faculty from University of Minnesota system schools
- Staff and Faculty from 4-year Private Institutions
- Students from Public Colleges and Universities
- Students from Private Colleges and Universities
- Staff from Nonprofit organizations with an interest in partnering with Higher Education

Additionally, a meeting was held with one of Minnesota's four tribal colleges prior to December. Feedback from that meeting informed the program recommendations in this report.

During these sessions, we gathered information about how institutions currently offer these types of opportunities, the challenges they face, and the program components that would make this appealing for student and institutional participation. Nonprofit organizations shared information about their current higher education partnerships and the challenges they face creating meaningful student learning experiences.

Guiding Principles for Program Design

Student Financial Need

Several principles guided the program design recommendations and implementation considerations in this report. First was a focus on designing a high-quality program that centers and supports students with financial need. Key elements of programs designed for maximum student benefit are described in the preliminary portion of this report. Students with financial need can be defined as those who are eligible for state and federal scholarships or those who need to borrow student loans or work to meet educational costs. One of our campus staff participants noted, *“most of our students are working if not part-time, more likely full-time and so it is very, very hard for our learners to take on an unpaid experience which a lot of service opportunities are...they've identified that being a significant barrier to gaining this experience”* (4-year Public). Another participant extends this concern, *“I think the barrier for us is really that financial piece. That a student will have to say no to something that we know*

would be life-changing for them because they just can't afford it" (4-year Public). Minnesota's investment in a state-wide service program would build capacity for these students to access meaningful educational and civic engagement experiences at non-profits in ways that are currently not attainable.

Flexibility in Program Design

The second guiding principle is flexibility in program design and delivery. Throughout our data gathering with Minnesota college students, campus staff/faculty/administrators, and potential nonprofit partners, the need for flexibility surfaced as a core feature of a desirable statewide service program. While it is understood that some elements of a statewide service program must be uniform in order to effectively administer and accurately evaluate change among participants, how the program is administered on individual campuses as well as where and when the service happens are important considerations that would benefit from local control.

One example of this desired flexibility is leaving open the possibility of hybrid work because of the time and expense it can take to commute to sites in both urban and rural areas. One public college student noted that fully in person experiences are a barrier to participation: *"The location of where it is. A lot of the stuff we are asked to do is kind of far away and then we have to get there on our own. So it's just the money going in to get to places."* Nonprofit partners are also sensitive to this concern. One non-profit participant explained, *"I'm not going to look somebody who is 20 years old and on a ramen budget in the eyes and say 'Hey, spend \$20 a day to come work for me for free'."*

Allowing for flexibility for campuses to house a service program in a department that best suits institutional goals was also a shared desire. A campus participant noted, *"I'm just [...] having questions about which [requirements] would be centralized from the program and which of that would be individualized through the campus and what's the through line, if there would be one, that we are all adhering to as we are working at thinking about the outcomes and how we are going to be measured"* (4-year Private). As such it is recommended that this program seeks to balance programmatic elements that are locally controlled at the same time there are standardized outcomes and measurements.

Strengthening Existing Campus / Community Partnerships

The final guiding principle is related to the importance of utilizing this program to strengthen existing campus and community partnerships. Nurturing these partner relationships will positively impact the long-term sustainability of a service program because the personal relationship between individuals from the two entities can aid in recruiting students, managing responsibilities and expectations of the overall experience, and building meaningful capacity within communities. One staff participant from a 4-year public identified this idea exactly. *“I think that being good stewards of the place we are in, nurturing and respecting those relationships and making sure that first opportunities are given to them is really important. We’ve got some really good relationships that if they heard this was happening and we didn’t extend an opportunity to them, they would probably be a little bit slighted and offended because they have always been willing to give our students a meaningful experience, they just can’t pay them.”* In order for programs to sustain, partnerships are best managed at the local level.

Program Design Recommendations

The earlier sections in this report outline best practices that should be incorporated into the final program design. Based on feedback from stakeholders, there is significant alignment between best practices and the interests of students, campus staff and faculty, and nonprofit partner organizations. Our recommendations for program design and implementation are included below.

Time and Effort

Program Design Recommendation #1: It is important to offer a variety of modalities for students to demonstrate the time and effort required to complete an internship or service experience.

College students have unique schedules and needs that can vary based on the institution they attend, their academic area of study, and their individual personal and professional goals and life circumstances. Opportunities in the summer and academic year with both day-time and evening opportunities are essential for diverse engagement. Year-long experiences are challenging as students'

academic schedules often change with the semester making them unable to commit more than 6 months in advance. Most academic internship opportunities require a minimum of 120-150 hours and are conducted over a summer or single semester. These structures allow students to have a significant, meaningful experience while also balancing other academic, familial, and personal obligations.

Program Design Recommendation #2: Students should have the opportunity to earn academic credit at their institution but it should not be a programmatic requirement.

Staff and students both felt strongly about a need for flexibility in this area. In addition to costs associated with earning credits, institutional requirements can vary significantly. This includes internships being limited to students with certain academic standing or having a minimum credit requirement. Internships often also require additional academic work (i.e. reflection logs, final papers, etc) which can present an additional burden if the student does not need the credit as a part of their academic requirements.

Interaction, Collaboration, and Experiences with Diversity

Program Design Recommendation #3: Utilizing a cohort design can support the inclusion of best practices throughout the experience.

A service program for college students can be enhanced by using a cohort model similar to the one used by #CCC. This model requires that each nonprofit site host a minimum of two students at any given time. This ensures that opportunities for collaboration and interaction are available and supports a cohort experience on site as well as through professional development.

Professional Development and Reflection

Program Design Recommendation #4: Opportunities for reflection and professional development should be incorporated into the program design.

In addition to the service experience itself, it is important to incorporate professional development and reflection into the program. Reflection is a key component of High Impact Practices and is recognized by the NACE as a best practice for any internship experience. Additionally, students identified a desire for additional training and support during our focus group sessions noting that opportunities for things like public speaking, networking, and collaboration were minimal during their high school years which were impacted by COVID. Campus staff also identified professional development as being a tool for recruitment and engagement of students. A staff member from a 4-year private institution said, *“I think there could also be an element of offering professional development as part of that package and that could help it appeal beyond just hourly work that pays a little bit more.”* Professional development opportunities should include a combination of reflection opportunities as well as opportunities for skill building. Campuses expressed an interest in leveraging existing resources and training opportunities so as to ensure that a breadth of opportunities are available and accessible to participating students.

Performance Expectations and Feedback

Program Design Recommendation #5: Nonprofit partner organizations should take the lead in outlining positions at their organizations.

As outlined in National Association of Colleges and Employers Best Practices for Internships, providing students with real tasks and assignments that are of value to the organization is key to success (NACE, n.d.). These experiences need to be appropriately challenging for the student, but should also engage them in actual work of the organization. Positions may primarily focus on direct service, may focus on capacity building, or may include elements of both types of experiences.

Program Design Recommendation #6: Mentorship and consistent supervision are essential to the overall student learning experience.

Throughout our listening sessions, students as well as campus staff and faculty expressed a desire for clear mentorship and supervision. In addition to clear job responsibilities and consistent feedback, students indicated that mentorship, particularly from those in leadership positions, was something they viewed as beneficial. One student attending a public college or university said, *“For most Gen Z’s, we kind of look for some mentorship from leaders. I’d say that could also be a nice connection if you could get connected to a mentor it would be great.”* In order to ensure that this level of support is available, nonprofit organizations must have adequate staff capacity. Students are likely to need a higher level of direct support from their site supervisor than regular, part-time employees and expectations need to be clearly outlined for nonprofit partners prior to committing to serve as a host site.

Staffing

Program Design Recommendation #7: Carefully consider the responsibilities of staffing needed to support this initiative.

Program design should consider impact on staff time, especially if state and federal funding are braided as additional funding sources will increase administrative load for campus and nonprofit staff. As one participant from a 4-year institution noted, *“If there is going to be a lot of management at the campus level, staff, some staff, are [already] taking on more than one role. So how do we recognize, reward people who are willing to step up and take on these duties. If there is funding to support that, I think that’s tremendous....who’s taking on this work and can they add it to their load?”* Decisions will need to be made at the campus level about tipping points for when a campus adds management of this new program to a current staff member’s role or if they need to hire an individual staff member to run the program. For example, the Bonner Leader program recommends one full-time staff for every 40 student participants on a campus.

In addition, parameters should be set for how funding is transferred to community partners for their role in program management. A program that intentionally rewards nonprofits for their efforts in

managing high quality experiences for students is equitable in design and more sustainable over the long run as it recognizes important community contributions.

Based on analysis of exemplary programs and additional stakeholder feedback, the following initial breakdowns of responsibilities are suggested:

- Campus Staff: Recruitment of students and partner organizations, provide localized professional development and reflection desired by each institution.
- Non-Profit Supervisor: Develop positions and position descriptions, set expectations for students, and provide regular feedback.
- Program Manager: Administer program, serve as the liaison between campus and community partner, provide or procure network wide professional development opportunities, program assessment.
- Regional Staff: As the program grows over time, it may be necessary to add regional staff to support partnership development, partnership management, and institutional consortiums.

Note: If federal funds, such as Americorps, are braided with state funds, it will be important to identify which of these different staff roles will take on particular grant management responsibilities such as communication with the state service commission, approving timesheets and position descriptions, delivering required program trainings, etc.

Implementation Considerations

In addition to recommendations for program design, data gathered throughout the feasibility study revealed several additional points of interest for consideration when building a statewide service program. These considerations are articulated below.

Students

Implementation Consideration #1: This program should consider targeting students in traditionally liberal arts and human services areas of study.

Campuses, both 2-year and 4-year, consistently expressed an interest in having this program serve students in areas of study that are not clearly linked to specific industries or career pathways. Areas linked to specific career pathways often already have clear pathways for engagement and experiential learning due to licensure and certification requirements. Students in liberal arts programs often lack these clear pathways and are less likely to have access to them. Additionally, these students need opportunities for career exploration during their college years. A faculty member from a 4-year public university said, *“Depending on the discipline, students sometimes have a really hard time connecting the skills they have learned to understanding that there is a much wider range of opportunities that you really have.”* Service and internship experiences can allow students to try out potential future careers which can help them plan for their professional careers.

Nonprofit Organizations

Implementation Consideration #2: College campuses should be involved in the recruitment of community organizations in order to leverage existing relationships and capitalize on local needs.

Feedback from nonprofit organizations indicated that direct communication with a specific contact person at a college or university led to the most successful outcomes in terms of recruiting students and creating mutually beneficial opportunities. These direct connections with local institutions allow for deeper partnerships and for community needs to be prioritized. This is especially true for campuses and partners in more rural areas where barriers such as transportation may also impact student access.

Implementation Consideration #3: Clear parameters around the type of organization eligible to participate in hosting students are necessary to maintain continuity of experiences.

Nonprofit organizations can vary greatly in terms of capacity and resources as well as within their missions. A nonprofit tax status does not necessarily mean that an organization is working toward civic

engagement or community need. For-profit businesses may operate a nonprofit “arm” or may be considered a “Public Benefit” organization. Additionally, state and local government offices can provide valuable learning experiences to students interested in civic and community engagement, but do not fall under the nonprofit category. These nuances should be considered when determining the eligibility of community organizations and partnerships.

Campus Partners

Implementation Consideration #4: Existing campus service programs should be considered in the overall program design and requirements.

Throughout the data collection period, a variety of existing programs were mentioned that have similar or complementary goals to a statewide service program. All institutions receiving federal work study funds are required to allocate at least 7% of these funds to positions that are based in the community. Campuses expressed an interest in finding ways to leverage these funds in a more intentional way to maximize their impact and build consistency and clarity amongst positions. Campuses also shared additional programs like AmeriCorps VISTA, and campus-specific internship and fellowship programs could be complementary to this type of program. One campus staff member noted this saying, *“I would love to see some clarification as the program rolls out on how this plays into the entire ecosystem of things we already have: Community-Based work study, internships, AmeriCorps Programming”* (4-Year Private). Considering these existing programs will ensure that the addition of a state-wide service program is additive to existing campus infrastructure rather than competing for the same time and resources.

Staffing

Implementation Consideration # 5: When identifying campus staff to administer the service program, any unintended impacts on current staff’s role and scope of position should be considered.

Feedback from our stakeholders indicated that union contracts should be taken into account when identifying staff who could assist in managing these programs on Minnesota State and University of Minnesota system campuses. If new responsibilities are added to their roles, other desirable work may be pulled from their positions rather than increasing their overall pay.

Financial Aid

Implementation Consideration #6: Build the financial award package for the service program with the influence it will have on a student's overall eligibility for Financial Aid in mind.

The top concern shared by #CaliforniansForAll College Corp was related to the negative impact that the living allowance and education award stipend had on students' eligibility for financial aid. As such, we consulted Megan Flores, State Financial Aid Manager, who articulated the following guidance related to Financial Aid in the State of Minnesota:

- The funding offered through this program should not be considered gift aid and it should supplement rather than supplant other forms of aid.
- Students already receiving full aid should be able to use these funds for housing, books, course fees, study abroad and other educational expenses.
- Considerations need to be made regarding how this service program will interact with the NorthStar program.

Funding

Implementation Consideration #7: Braided funding using state and federal funds should be used in order to ensure program equity.

Funding from state government serves as a multiplier for a program that would otherwise be reliant on AmeriCorps and community cost share to fund these experiences. Currently, AmeriCorps funds cannot be used to support non-resident students including international students and DACA recipients.

State funding will ensure that these important populations can be fully included with their peers which was a concern echoed by multiple constituencies. *“Paid internships would be very helpful especially to international students and students of color,”* said one student at a private college.

Equity can also be promoted through support to campuses in rural and outlying areas of the state. Access to funds to pay interns is as much of a limitation on existing programs as opportunities for meaningful work. Statewide access to funds with a program that could partner with institutions of higher education in any county, would have a leveling effect for students and communities across the state.

Implementation Consideration #8: Adequate funding should be allocated to campuses and student participants in order to reduce financial and capacity limitations.

Participating campuses will play an important role in recruiting and managing programs and should therefore receive compensation for their time and effort. Staff at several campuses that are familiar with the reporting requirement for AmeriCorps expressed caution with meeting those requirements in addition to their other responsibilities. Additionally, those staff that are already managing student partnerships in the community have their hands full navigating challenges from transportation to risk management. State funding should be used to supplement staff infrastructure at campuses with a significant cohort of interns.

We spoke with nonprofits representing a range of sizes and financial support. To construct the ideal program for students it will be critical to balance offering a living stipend that is comparable to jobs in the community with a range of opportunities that is not limited by the host site or college campus’ ability to contribute to the stipend. An investment in stipend by the State of Minnesota will allow for more community partners to participate in this program.

Scaling Over Time

Implementation Consideration #9: The State of Minnesota and the Office of Higher Education should strongly consider a planning year prior to a pilot launch of a state-wide service initiative.

This report has identified best practices, program design recommendations, and several additional considerations for the state to take into account when planning a college student service initiative. There is no question that this feasibility study revealed that a state-funded service initiative is seen as desirable among all constituents in all parts of the state. What is less clear, however, are many of the specifics related to fully operationalizing different elements of the program. One example is ensuring that the timeline of available funding aligns with the recruitment timeline for nonprofits and campuses. Campuses and nonprofits will struggle to commit to investing in program design without upfront funding, or at the *very* least assurance of available funding, to put effort into planning and design.

Another example is ensuring that the goals of the state and the goals of federal funding sources such as Americorps are aligned with institutional goals such that launching the program is seamless. Once the state can determine which program elements are non-negotiable, and which have flexibility, campuses will be able to more easily identify how this program will best work within their structure and how to best identify the most appropriate nonprofit partners for the program. For example, campuses will need time to decide where the program is housed, who is administering it, and how funding is allocated. A planning year would allow sufficient time for designing this structure for future pilot program campuses.

A final reason to invest in a planning year is related to narrowing in more specifically on budget numbers for the exact amount of financial award/stipend a student should receive and the exact amount of funding that should be allocated to campuses and nonprofits per student participating in the program. There are guideposts set by the #CaliforniansForAll College Corps program that can be taken into consideration for decision-making in this arena. In California, the total financial award for students is set at \$10,000 and \$8,000 *per participating student* is ear-marked to support administering the student. More specific investigation is required to specifically identify appropriate amounts for these allocations in Minnesota such that wise decisions are made regarding the true cost of the program.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for and interest in a state-funded service program in the State of Minnesota. The establishment of a service program would meet needs of communities and higher education institutions across the state. More importantly, it would reduce the debt burden of college students while simultaneously providing access to deeply meaningful learning and career development opportunities. Focusing on the recommendations in this report, which are representative of voices of Minnesotans across the state, will result in a strong program built to scale and sustain over time.

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