

Making Purpose Possible



AMERICA AT A CROSSROADS: THE UNTAPPED POWER OF SERVICE

America stands at a civic crossroads. As we approach our nation's 250th anniversary, volunteer participation has stagnated at just 28% — a critical gap that weakens our social fabric and ability to meet growing community needs.

At the same time, our country faces a loneliness epidemic, declining trust, and deepening division. Volunteering is one of the most accessible ways to bridge divides, reduce isolation, and foster connection, trust and belonging.

The urgency is real, and the research is powerful. Nearly half of nonprofits struggle to fill volunteer roles, 29% face funding cuts impacting program delivery, and volunteer infrastructure receives just 0.19% of foundation giving despite its critical importance to community resilience.

Making Purpose Possible is an ambitious, movement-building strategy to transform how service strengthens personal purpose, deepens community connection, and builds national resilience.

At the heart of this work is a bold goal: to double the rate of volunteering in the U.S. to 150 million by 2035. But this is more than participation. It's about unlocking the full potential of service as a force for belonging, healing, and civic renewal — so that everyone in every community has the opportunity to live a life of meaning and purpose and contribute to something greater than themselves.



SERVICE IN AMERICA'S DNA: RECLAIMING OUR LEGACY

Service has always been a defining feature of American identity — from community mutual aid efforts and volunteer fire brigades to the civic associations that Alexis de Tocqueville observed as the backbone of our democracy. This spirit of neighbor helping neighbor has historically bridged divides, built social capital, and strengthened our national fabric.



As our founder, President George H.W. Bush said,

: “There can be no
: definition of a successful
: life that does not include
: service to others.”

Today, we face a disconnect between this heritage and our lived reality. The National Volunteer Strategy envisions a future where everyone in America is volunteering, where each person is connected to their purpose and can be a point of light in their community, contributing to building a more perfect union, one act of service at a time.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SUSTAINED IMPACT

Transforming America's volunteer landscape requires more than good intentions — it demands a comprehensive, phased strategy with interdependent initiatives that build on one another to deliver systems-level change. Making Purpose Possible is built on six core initiatives, deployed across three strategic phases, with one cross-cutting commitment that enables and sustains them all.



Phase 1 — Laying the Foundation

This strategic approach centers on building the essential infrastructure — coalitions, technology, and systems — that enables and amplifies all other efforts.

Reimagining Service 2035:

Shape a National Strategy Through Cross-Sector Collaboration

We will unite civic leaders from every sector — nonprofit, corporate, government, faith, higher education, academic, and philanthropic — into a powerful coalition to expand access to service and activate broader volunteer participation. Proven collective impact models have driven meaningful changes in areas like policy, health, veterans support and education, demonstrating the potential of coordinated, cross-sector action. Informed by similar successful efforts in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, and Zimbabwe, this coalition will develop a national strategy for volunteering rooted in equity and designed in deep partnership with local communities.

We will lay the foundation for lasting civic renewal where individuals *know they are essential* to community progress.

Through structured dialogue and community workshops we will create a national roadmap for fostering connection, purpose, and belonging. As the engine of this movement, it will drive innovation, amplify impact, and lay the foundation for lasting civic renewal where individuals *know they are essential* to community progress.



Modernize the Volunteer Experience Through Technology and Innovation

To meet the expectations of modern volunteers and the evolving needs of nonprofits, the field must adapt. Philanthropic capital is critical to launching a bold digital and AI strategy that transforms how service is accessed, personalized, and measured nationwide. This includes advancing integrated platforms, shared data systems, and inclusive digital tools that make volunteering easier, more impactful, and more aligned with personal values and interests. Alongside these innovations, we will equip organizations with the insights, training, and support needed to adopt and scale new technologies. By translating insight into action, this strategy will unlock more accessible, purpose-driven, and dynamic pathways to civic participation nationwide.



Phase 2 — Learning and Testing What Works

Developing, testing, and scaling innovative solutions through community-driven experimentation and capacity building is critical to building sustainable programs and operations.

Continuing Reimagining Service 2035

The coalition work evolves to focus on learning from pilot programs, surfacing community-driven innovations, and identifying scalable solutions for widespread adoption that foster connection, purpose, and civic belonging.

Equip the Volunteer Sector to Strengthen Volunteer Engagement

Too many nonprofits lack the capacity to recruit, train, retain, and truly mobilize volunteers effectively — limiting their ability to meet community needs and sustain long-term impact. Philanthropic investments will help build a stronger volunteer infrastructure through targeted staffing support, inclusive engagement models, and field-tested strategies that not only improve organizational capacity, but also foster deeper purpose and belonging for the individuals who serve. To ensure this impact reaches every corner of America, we will establish regional hubs that coordinate civic action, lead volunteer-powered initiatives, and build durable local coalitions. These local ecosystems create a continuous feedback loop between grassroots innovation and national strategy turning successful local approaches into systems-level change that benefits both communities and the people who power them.

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Elevate Youth Leadership to Drive Civic Renewal

Young people are essential to the future of civic life — and critical to its renewal today. Embedding youth leadership and service across the Making Purpose Possible strategy will catalyze long-term participation, strengthen community connection, and foster a generation rooted in purpose, agency, and belonging. This approach centers youth voice at every level, positioning young people as leaders and contributors rather than recipients of service. By increasing opportunities for meaningful engagement, shifting public narratives, and building the capacity of institutions to involve youth as civic actors, we will accelerate culture change and close generational gaps in volunteer participation. The result will be a more inclusive, resilient civic infrastructure — one that reflects the energy, diversity, and vision of the youngest generations and ensures that every young person sees themselves as a changemaker in a vibrant society.



Phase 3 — Igniting the Movement

Strategic approaches drive widespread cultural transformation by scaling proven strategies and inspiring nationwide participation in civic life.

Inspire a Cultural Shift Toward Inclusive Civic Participation

Despite a post-pandemic rebound, volunteerism remains far below what communities need — and what a thriving civic culture demands. Too many people still face barriers to participating, or don't see themselves reflected in traditional narratives of service. Volunteering must be redefined not only as a civic responsibility, but as a path to personal purpose, belonging, and connection. Philanthropy has a unique opportunity to catalyze this shift, fueling a national movement that embeds service into identity. Through national campaigns, expanded access, and community-driven engagement strategies, we will train trusted local leaders, scale inclusive programs, and inspire 150 million people to take part. The result will be a more connected, compassionate society — where everyone sees themselves as a changemaker.

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Cross-Cutting Initiative — Building What Works

This initiative supports all phases by investing in the infrastructure, insights, and capacity needed to drive long-term impact and scale what works.

Strengthening the Infrastructure and Investment to Sustain Volunteering

Volunteering isn't just nice; it's necessary. Yet it remains severely under-resourced, despite its critical role in community resilience and individual well-being. Addressing this gap requires bold philanthropic vision to build the infrastructure and funding systems that can sustain service at a national scale. By developing a data-driven national impact Volunteer Dashboard and generating rigorous, actionable research, we will transform how service is valued, funded, and integrated into American life. This research will reframe volunteering as a strategy for population-level and individual well-being, equip nonprofits and funders with field-tested insights, and strengthen the infrastructure that supports civic participation and local leadership. It will also inform policy innovation that removes systemic barriers to engagement, ensuring that America's civic infrastructure receives the same intentional support we give to other essential systems — and creating a foundation that will sustain volunteering not just for today, but for generations to come.

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FUELING PROGRESS: MEASUREMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

Powerful movements for civic renewal require both bold action and rigorous learning. To ensure every dollar invested drives meaningful progress, we are building a robust learning system that measures not only the strength of Making Purpose Possible, but also the real impact of our collective efforts on individuals, communities, and society. The health of each phase and initiative will be tracked through participation, shared governance, and trust, while strategic outcomes will be measured across four pillars: funding, nonprofit capacity, volunteer participation, and civic infrastructure. Tools such as a national dashboard, adoption metrics, community surveys, and policy benchmarks will offer real-time insight into what's working — and why. This approach goes beyond accountability. It is a learning engine designed to surface breakthrough strategies, adapt based on evidence, and accelerate our shared mission. Foundation partners will see measurable results, honest reflections, and data-informed decisions that help double volunteering nationwide and reshape how America approaches civic engagement.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT: LIGHTING THE PATH FORWARD

As America approaches its 250th birthday, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reignite civic life and unite our nation through service.

Making Purpose Possible is more than a strategy — it is a call to action and a commitment to the future. By joining this effort, funders and partners help shape a new model of civic engagement that builds stronger communities, restores trust, and invites every individual to live a life of meaning and purpose through service. Now is the time to invest in the collective power of service to light the path toward a stronger, more connected society.



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