

Recruitment: Lessons Learned and Strategies for 2022

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Service Year Alliance



ALBUQUERQUE, NM • JUNE 1-3 • #WESTERNSERVICE

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2022 NATIONAL SERVICE TRAINING

AMERICA'S
SERVICE
COMMISSIONS



Opening Reflections

1. What was your most successful recruitment strategy this past year?
2. What's been your biggest recruitment challenge?
3. What's one goal you have for recruitment over the next year?

Presenters

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OUR MISSION

To make a year of paid, full-time service — a service year — a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans.

Our 3 Goals

EXPANSION:

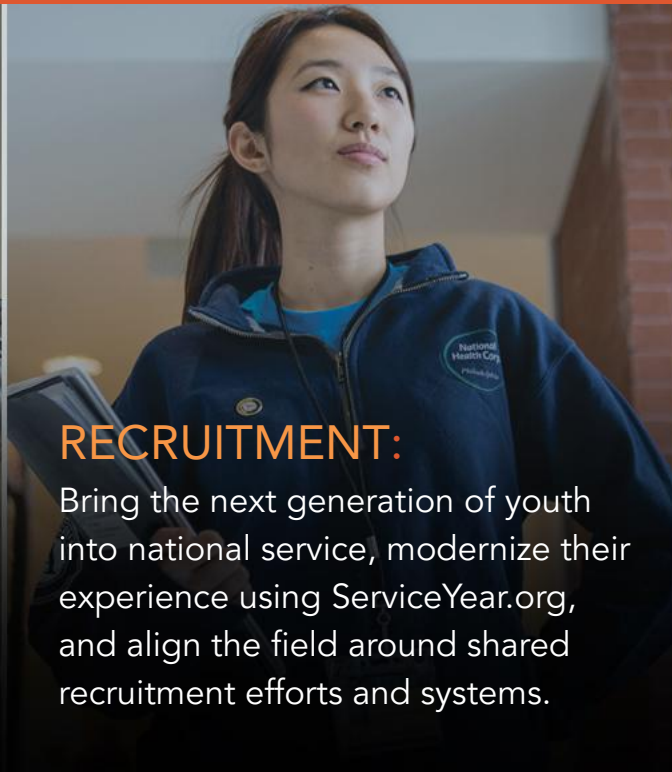
Build support from external stakeholders to make the recent expansions of national service successful in a new era.

RECRUITMENT:

Bring the next generation of youth into national service, modernize their experience using ServiceYear.org, and align the field around shared recruitment efforts and systems.

IMPACT:

Foster collaborative approaches to demonstrate the impact of service years by lifting up exemplary programs and communities.



Agenda

- Overview: Paid Social Media Advertising
- Learnings from High School Transitions project
- Discussion: Social media and reaching your audience
- Learnings from Climate + Service Years project
- Discussion: Messaging your opportunities
- Reflection and Closing

Opening Reflections

1. What was your most successful recruitment strategy this past year?
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Why use paid social media
advertising?

Why Paid Social Media Advertising?

- Organic reach is declining
 - Average organic reach for a Facebook post is about 5.5% of your followers - even less for brands with large followings
- More effective audience targeting
 - 99% of 18-28 year olds use social media
- Better data
- Less expensive than other forms of advertising

How to Prepare for a Paid Social Media Campaign

- Determine an objective (i.e. reach/impressions, lead generation, clicks, landing page views, conversions/applications)
- Identify your audience(s)
- Set a budget
- Determine timing
- Choose your platform(s) (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, Twitch, LinkedIn)
- Nail down your messaging
- Choose creative (i.e. images and/or videos)
- Have a plan for tracking in place (i.e. tracking links, pixels, Google Analytics)
- You're ready!

ServiceYear.org

- ServiceYear.org is a state-of-the-art marketplace and resource hub that connects young people interested in doing a service year with paid service year opportunities.
- Service Year Alliance launched a paid national recruitment and awareness campaign to raise awareness for service year programs (like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps) on social media in 2017 and has continued to refine and develop campaign concepts based on new learnings and marketplace needs.

High School Transitions:

Recruitment Pilot, Focus Group, and Partner
Feedback

Goals of Digital Recruitment Pilot

- **Overall Goals:**
 - Learn how best to recruit recent high school graduates into service years
 - Better understand how to recruit younger, more diverse audiences, including reaching both high school grads and GED recipients
- **Tactics and Timing:**
 - Service Year Alliance engaged Precision, a digital firm with experience in issue campaigns & national service, to run a digital pilot from August through October 2021
 - This pilot launched new ad concepts on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, and included testing different messages, creative, and tactics in reaching the intended audience.
 - Ad performance was measured both in success at building awareness, as well as in ability to drive applications to open service year opportunities on ServiceYear.org, including to a high school focused landing page we created in consultation with a learning cohort of programs focused on recruiting more high school grads into service years

Learnings: Message Testing

- **Better You/Greater Us Message Frame:**
 - This pilot reinforced a core element of Service Year Alliance's past research and message testing for all audiences. When marketing to recent high school grads—now part of Gen Z—it is important to highlight the dual concept that service years provide professional growth/benefits as well as make a community impact. Ads that only focused on personal or professional growth were not as successful.
- **Authenticity is key for Gen Z:**
 - Respect this audience. Be clear about what the opportunity offers and involves, and consider ways to offer opportunities to ask questions to earn trust. Also acknowledge that they're making a big life decision on what to do after graduation.

Learnings: Message Testing

- **Timely and Relevant Messages:**
 - It is valuable to acknowledge the moment that this audience is living in and reach them with timely and relevant messages.
- **Urgency:**
 - Timebound messaging is effective and creates a sense of urgency to apply. You can drive actions by using words like: “Today, Now, Don’t miss out”
- **Action-Oriented Images and Videos:**
 - Visuals provided in ads should answer “What will I be doing if I join?” Ads should also utilize images that are warm and playful to be more inviting.

Learnings: Best Performing Ads Facebook & Instagram

Service Year
Published by Precision Strategies · September 24 ·

Times are tough. Are you looking for ways to help? There are opportunities to serve others and build real-world skills. Find the right opportunity for you with programs nationwide.




SERVICEYEAR.ORG
See where a service year can take you

Learn More

Service Year
Published by Precision Strategies · August 19 ·

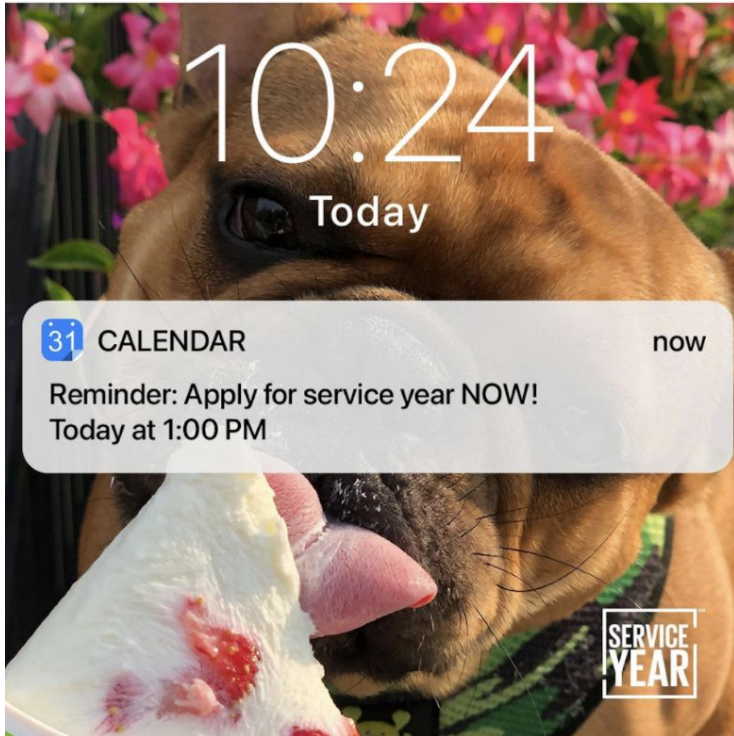
Ever wonder where a year of service can take you? Find opportunities at home or around the country to develop real-world skills through hands-on service that are right for you. Learn more about doing a service year and apply today!



SERVICEYEAR.ORG
Take the first step. Apply today!

Apply now

Learnings: Best Performing Ads Snapchat



Learnings: Digital Tactics

- **Timing:**
 - Be thoughtful about timing and when to message to high school students.
 - High school seniors (ages 17 & 18) should be targeted with content optimizing for applications between August and January, before they commit to post-grad plans.
 - High school juniors (ages 16 & 17) should be targeted with content that raises awareness and drives registrations between February and July to prime them to apply the following August-January.
- **Platforms:**
 - Facebook/Instagram: Facebook was most effective at driving applications in this pilot. Instagram was better than Facebook for awareness, but was less effective than Facebook at delivering applications.
 - Snapchat: Snapchat was incredibly effective for raising awareness but not for applications.
- **Remarketing:**
 - Getting service years in front of people, especially younger audiences, more than once is critical to building awareness of the concept and moving people from interested to application.

Audience Recommendations

Strategically using lookalike audiences allows us to reach more diverse audiences or people interested in specific issue areas. Lookalike audiences allow you to leverage audiences already engaging with you to reach greater audiences. We used a lookalike audience of our recent applicants in this pilot campaign, but there are additional ways to leverage this audience technique:

- **Diversity** - Using a lookalike audience of all registrants could constrain your push for diversity since you'll be targeting people who 'look like' those already in your list. However, you can create a lookalike audience based on diverse personnel already participating in service years and create a lookalike of that audience instead.
- **Interest Segmentation** - Another tool is to leverage the types of service years participants do. You can create lookalike audiences for education, environmental, etc. groups based on the participants currently engaging in those programs. This allows you to reach an audience that is tailor-made to be interested in your programs.

Focus Group Insights



- Service Year Alliance worked with Strategies 360 to conduct a qualitative focus group to gather insights into motivations and barriers to doing a service year after high school.
- The focus group ran from March 1 to March 3, 2022 and included 24 16-19 year olds, offering a range of perspectives from high school students and individuals who had recently graduated or received a GED

Focus Group Insights

- Young people are not entirely set in their career pathway or future goals — there is a lot of **room for more information and persuasion**
- Service years **need to be viewed as a viable option** vs more traditional/known pathways:
 - Financial benefits need to be clear up front
 - Establishing a sense of community and a support system for corps members is an essential factor to considering a service year
 - Terminology needs to be simple and relatable
 - It needs to be clear what sets service years apart from other job opportunities (e.g. skill development and training)
 - Influence of family and friends in making decisions
- **Availability of opportunities close to home** is especially important for this age range

Learning Cohort Insights — What's Working

- Personal connections and word of mouth
 - Siblings/friends of corps members
 - Mentor/mentee relationships with high school students/recruiting in schools where corps members serve
 - Engaging alums in targeted recruitment as ambassadors
- Calling/texting students as a follow up strategy
- Connections with local youth serving programs and high schools
 - Leading brief presentations in classes/other venues, both in-person and virtual
- Promoting educational pathways and service year supports
 - Education award, higher ed partnerships/ed award match

Learning Cohort Insights — Not Working or Mixed Results

- College and career recruitment fairs (virtual and in-person)
 - “It seems that high school students choose to attend the sessions at these events that align with their preconceived ideas about what they want to do after high school, so we aren't able to tap that audience that doesn't yet know about AmeriCorps or the benefit of a service year.”
- Job boards - Sometimes helpful and yield high numbers, but not always the most engaged candidates

Small Group Discussion

Discussion

Reaching Target Audiences + Social Media

1. Who are the main audiences you're trying to reach through digital and in-person tactics?
2. What social media and virtual platforms are you using to recruit?
3. What tactics are working well? Where are you hitting barriers trying to recruit and raise awareness on social media and virtual platforms?

Climate + Service Years

Poll, Message Testing, and Focus Group

Timeline for Polling & Message Testing

January 2022:

- **Polling:** Conducted a quantitative poll of 18-28 year olds to understand young people's attitudes towards the Civilian Climate Corps and climate-related service years

February-March 2022:

- **Social Media Message Testing:** Drafted and began testing new climate messaging via social media ad campaigns targeting 18-28 year olds
- **Focus Group Message Testing:** Coordinated a qualitative focus group of 16-26 year olds to gather additional insights into poll results, feedback on messaging and campaign concepts, and overall learnings on recruitment for service years.

Poll Background and Results

Poll Overview

Goal: Understand young people's attitudes towards the CCC, workforce development, and climate service years

- Conducted by Data for Progress
- January 21-26, 2022
- Respondents:
 - 711 people
 - Ages 18-28
 - An oversample of:
 - Black and Latino respondents
 - 18-21-year-olds
 - Representative samples of urban, suburban, and rural voters

Topline Findings

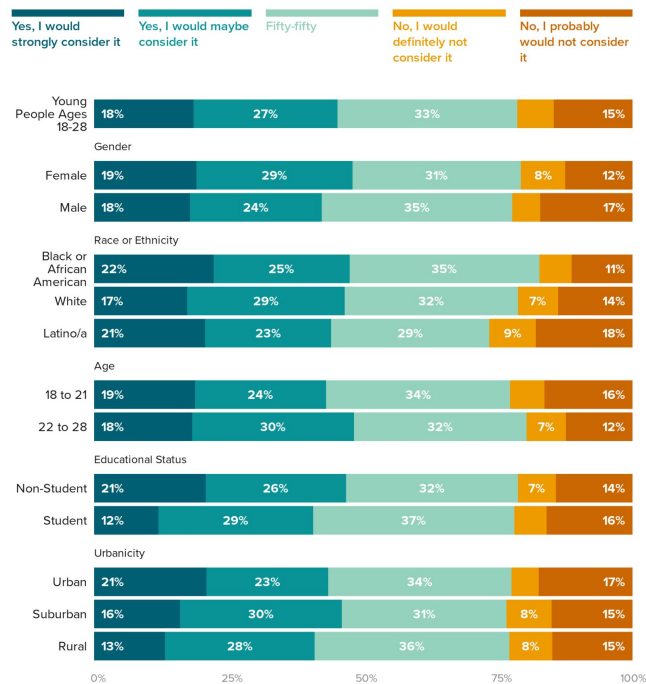
- 65% of young people care about climate change but are not sure what they can do personally to make a difference
- 45% of young people say they would “strongly” or “maybe” consider doing a service year
- 72% of young people support the Civilian Climate Corps as proposed by Congress and the White House
- 38% of young people say they would ‘strongly’ or ‘maybe’ consider joining the CCC

Nearly half of young people would consider a service year

- 45% of young people say they would “strongly” or “maybe” consider doing a service year
- 33% of people also identify as “fifty-fifty”

Nearly Half of Young People Would Consider Participating in a Service Year

Would you ever consider participating in a service year — a paid opportunity to develop real-world skills through hands-on service?



Young people widely support the CCC

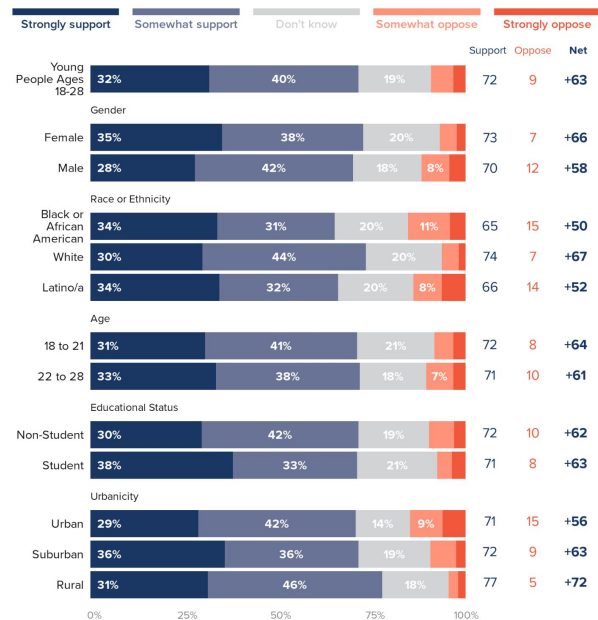
- **72%** of young people support the Civilian Climate Corps as proposed by Congress and the White House
- This includes support from **77%** of young people living in rural areas

Young People Widely Support the CCC, Especially Those Living in Rural Areas

Some lawmakers in Congress have proposed a new program called the Civilian Climate Corps (CCC). Members of the CCC will spend one year working on conservation, sustainability, public works, green infrastructure projects, and other climate-related efforts. Some of the benefits of the CCC include:

- Earning at least \$15 an hour with full benefits, including health care
- On-the-job training opportunities
- Assistance paying for school or student loans

Do you support or oppose the Civilian Climate Corps?



Learnings: Top reasons to join the CCC

- The most convincing reason to join the CCC is the **\$15 an hour living wage with benefits**
- The second most convincing reason besides salary/benefits is receiving **assistance to pay for school or pay off student loans.**
- The least convincing reason was meeting and forming connections with young people from different backgrounds.
- Among those more interested in joining the CCC, the top three reasons to join are:
 - 1: earning \$15/hour
 - 2: taking action to address climate change
 - 3: receiving assistance to pay for school or pay off student loans
- Among those that are less/not interested, the principal reasons are:
 - 1: they're already happy with their job/career plan
 - 2: they don't want to move if there isn't availability close to home

Key Takeaways

- People want to take action on climate change & we need to message climate service years + the CCC as a way to do that
- Increasing the living allowance to \$15/hr will make service years more appealing and accessible
- There is a lot of potential to increase interest in service years + support for the CCC
- We need to do a better job talking about the education award, particularly when marketing to students
- People need more information on where they can serve & the types of projects that are available, both near their hometowns & in communities across the country
- Personal benefits are most important and framing even altruistic benefits as personal gains could help to center the individual in our messaging
- Platforms that center video are important (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat), especially for reaching younger audiences

Climate Message Testing

Historical Messaging Learnings

- “Better You, Greater Us” messaging that highlights personal gain & community/greater good benefits together consistently drives the best engagement.
 - This is the basis of our definition of a service year as a paid opportunity to develop real-world skills through hands-on service.
- Messages relating to immediate concerns (e.g. addressing hurricanes and/or wildfires) typically drives more interest than generic messaging. Messaging that leverages current news headlines like hurricane/wildfire relief has generated more interest and clicks.
- In the past, we've had the most success in running ads that feature images of outdoor service, disaster response, and natural landscapes.

Initial Concepts & Message Testing

Based on learnings from the poll results and past recruitment efforts, we began testing four initial campaign concepts on social media:

1. What role will you play?
2. YOU
3. Want to help but don't know how?
4. Our planet can't wait

Concept #1: What role will you play?

- Highlight specific types of projects/role someone can play when serving
- Mix of urban & rural; conservation & climate
- “Cool” and tangible examples like:
 - building an urban farm in your neighborhood.
 - weatherizing homes to make them more energy efficient.
 - installing solar panels to reduce carbon emissions.

Concept #1: What role will you play?

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...

X

You can spend your service year helping your hometown respond to natural disasters. Learn how to get paid and get involved in the effort to help the environment at ServiceYear.org.



SERVICEYEAR.ORG
Help the environment through
a service year

APPLY NOW

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...

X

You can spend your service year building an urban farm in your neighborhood. Learn how to get paid and get involved in the effort to help the environment at ServiceYear.org.



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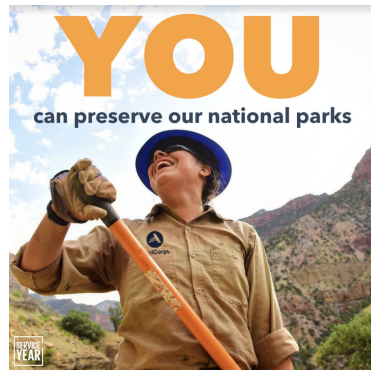
APPLY NOW

Concept #2: YOU

- Centering YOU in the message to highlight what a climate service year allows an individual to do – both the benefits and the actual project
- Gets to the takeaway: personal benefits are most important and framing even altruistic benefits as personal gains could help to *center the individual in our messaging* (how “you” can take action)

Concept #2: YOU (Projects)

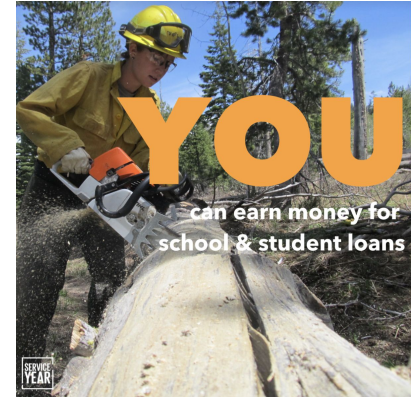
Example Ads



A Better You. A Greater Us.

Concept #2: YOU (Benefits)

Example Ads



A Better You. A Greater Us.

Concept #3: Want to help but don't know how?

- Acknowledge climate change is a big problem
- We all want to make a difference but it's not clear how
- A service year is a way to help
- Put your passion into action

Concept #3: Want to help but don't know how?

Example Ads



Concept #4: Our planet can't wait

- Future generations need us to step up to save the environment
 - Poll responses showed a strong interest in protecting the environment for future generations
- Everyone has a role to play
- You can make a difference through a paid service year

Concept #4: Our planet can't wait

SERVICE YEAR! Service Year
Sponsored · 

Everyone has a role to play in saving the environment. From conserving parks and protecting wildlife to leading efforts to make your community more resilient, you can make a real difference. Be part of the solution through a paid service year at ServiceYear.org.



SERVICEYEAR.ORG
Be part of the solution.
A service year can help

APPLY NOW

 Like  Comment  Share

Example Ads



A Better You. A Greater Us.

Early Campaign Results

- "You" campaign has been the **top driver of applications** from Facebook/Instagram and swipe ups on Snapchat
- "Our Planet Can't Wait" campaign has had some of the highest engagement — **most comments** on Facebook and most impressions on Snapchat
- "Want to help but don't know how?" has had the **highest number of post saves** on Facebook, suggesting that this concept could work well to build initial interest and create an audience for retargeting

Focus Group Learnings

Climate Focus Group



Background

Service Year Alliance worked with Strategies 360 to conduct a qualitative focus group to gather feedback on climate messaging, campaign concepts, example ads, and overall learnings on recruitment for service years.

The focus group ran from March 8 to March 10, 2022 and included 26 16-28 year olds, offering a range of perspectives from high school students, college grads, and individuals early in career exploration.

Climate Focus Group

Interest and buy-in for climate service years and the CCC

Most participants noted the benefits and positive value in service years generally—they liked the idea of being able to help people, socialize, meet different types of people/getting new perspectives, and feel involved with the community.

Both what stands out from the description of a service year and the most important benefits tend to be that a service year is paid, followed by the ability to gain new skills/experiences and the ability to make an impact/drive change

Most participants see climate service years/the CCC as a good way to protect the environment, promote sustainability, and address environmental issues and prevent future issues.

Climate Focus Group

Participant concerns + areas to consider

The overall value of service years, as well as their role as part of the solution to climate change, needs to be clear:

- General concerns about safety, health, and pay — in addition to possibly moving to a new place and adjusting both to the location and new relationships. Some participants cited the potential for it to disrupt someone's career path and concerns about the time commitment.
- Participants had concerns about the lasting impact of climate service years and their value as being too small when compared to an issue like climate change that requires structural and systemic solutions.

Climate Focus Group

Feedback on ad campaigns

Messages

- Participants respond particularly well when statements clarify the benefits, e.g. pay and education awards. They want and need to know up front what they will get out of the experience. The most popular statement focuses on the pay and education benefits
- They also respond well to the more descriptive statements with details on how their service will make an impact. For example, participants ask how exactly they would be helping the environment.

Photos

- Participants respond really well to images with people who look happy and engaged in their work and that show them what service could look like.
- The YOU images are popular, especially "YOU can get paid."
- "Our planet can't wait" with the image of the wildfire is also popular as it demonstrates the urgency and the need and helps people visualize the impact they could have. As a concept, this needs to be paired with the positive solution/way to take action.

Discussion

Discussion

Messaging service years:

1. What are the top reasons people join your program? How does this factor into your current messaging?
2. What resonates most with you from the message testing, ad concepts, and learnings?
3. Is there anything surprising, or that you feel is missing, based on the poll results and message testing?

Discussion

Big Ideas:

Successful recruitment doesn't happen in isolation — what are some big ideas you have relating to partnerships, tactical strategies, and resources that could be beneficial not just for your program, but for national service more generally?

Closing and Resources

Takeaways from today's session

Reflection

- At the start of the session, you reflected on what's going well, challenges, and a goal you had for recruitment.
- Taking into consideration our conversations on recruitment today, what is **at least one new thing you'd like to try** with recruitment this year?
 - Examples could include new messages, partnerships, virtual platforms, tactics, etc.

Resources + Ways to Stay Engaged

- Resources:
 - ServiceYear.org
 - Service Year Resource Hub: resources.serviceyear.org
 - Recruitment Plan Guide + Digital Recruitment Toolkit
- Stay engaged:
 - Help test messages, use shared language, and share feedback
 - Share photos and stories
 - Send us questions, ideas, thoughts



Thank you!

ServiceYearAlliance.org

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