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Mayor Bloomberg Launches New Volunteer Initiative

By Julia Kantor

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NEW YORK—Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg on Monday announced the launch of the NYC Service initiative that will promote volunteer opportunities throughout New York City and will add civic service to the K-12 public school curriculum.

The program aims to engage residents to tackle challenges resulting from the economic downturn, increase access to volunteer opportunities, and educate students on the value of serving others.

The plan was developed through a comprehensive 60-day review chaired by First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris, as part of the Mayor's State of the City pledge to contribute to President's Obama's nationwide call for expanded service. Public and private sector expert consultations, focus group data, and a survey of 1,500 New Yorkers on volunteer participation were considered in this effort.

"Throughout the planning and focus groups we found one thing for sure: New Yorkers love their City and want to help their communities and their neighbors," said Deputy Mayor Harris.

"We have created a plan that connects this desire to serve with opportunities to make a difference. We are deeply grateful to all the local and national service leaders who lent their time and wisdom to contribute to this exciting effort," added Deputy Mayor Harris.

The Mayor was joined at the Armory Track and Field in Washington Heights by Caroline Kennedy on behalf of the U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy who co-championed the Serve America Act with Senator Orrin Hatch, and by the U.S. Representative Carolyn McCarthy who sponsored the House version of the bill, as well as by the chair of the Board of the Corporation for National and Community Service Board Alan Solomont, chair of the New York State Commission on National and Community Service Board Susie Stern, Donna Smith from the New York State Office of National and Community Service, and executive director of the New York State Office of National and Community Service Mark Walter. The senior advisor to President Obama Valerie Jarrett joined the event by video, while Sway Calloway of MTV News served as a co-host and Carol Woods sang the closing number. President Obama is expected to sign the bipartisan national service legislation on Tuesday in Washington, D.C.

"New York has always been fortunate to be home to everyday people who want to pitch in and help—and we need as much help now as ever before," said Mayor Bloomberg. "NYC Service will channel New Yorkers' good intentions to tackle our greatest challenges, particularly those caused by the economic downturn. We are meeting the President's call to action and New York City will be the first city to strategically connect the power of its volunteers to solving its biggest problems," he added.

The NYC Service program will increase volunteer opportunities aimed at strengthening local neighborhoods through improvements in safety, education, environment, health, emergency preparedness and support of local residents in need. Among planned activities are:

- Block Watch program and the volunteer-based Police Auxiliary Unit expansion to increase neighborhood safety
- Block Beautification program to revive local public spaces
- Shape Up programs to expand free fitness activities
- Increased free legal services related to foreclosure prevention, consumer credit and immigration
- The Rooftop Cooling program to paint roofs white in order to reduce energy consumption

In response to the survey where 17 percent of New Yorkers stated that they do not know where to go to volunteer, the program will increase public access to volunteer opportunities through the following initiatives:

- A 311 service to provide volunteer opportunities information
- A new website to serve as a one-stop shop to locate and access volunteer opportunities
- A "Go Pass" Volunteer Screening to reduce the time and cost spent on detailed background checks for prospective volunteers
- NYC Civic Corps to define strategic placement of volunteers across nonprofit organizations and public agencies

The program will also promote a sustained culture of service among the younger generations through the initiatives incorporated in the education system, including the following:

- Service in Schools program will require all schools to have a service plan starting in the fall, thereby enabling all students in 1,500 schools to have access to civic service programs.
- Summer of Service program will engage approximately 1,000 participants of the Summer Youth Employment Program in large-scale service projects across the City.

The Mayor plans to appoint a Chief Service Officer to oversee implementation of approximately 40 programs within the NYC Service initiative, as well as to provide public reports on these efforts.

The Mayor also announced implementation of the "Give Your BLANK" campaign that will cast real New York City volunteers to promote the spirit of giving through TV, radio, print, outdoor and online ventures.