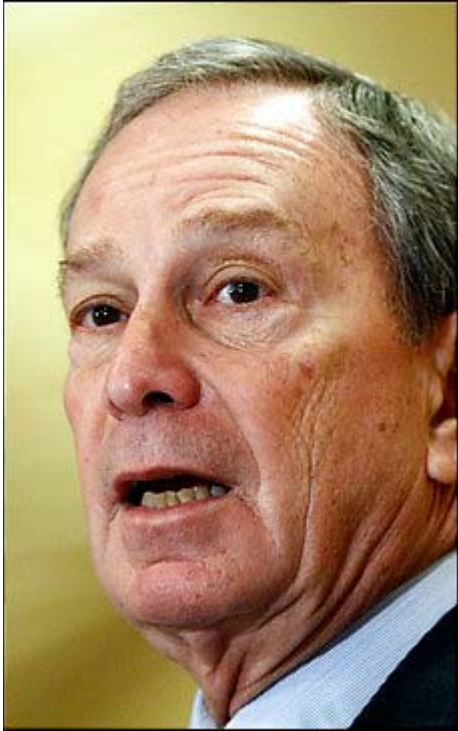


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New York City Musters Power of Its Volunteers



Bloomberg: "A new era of service." (Win Mcnamee - Getty Images)

By [Robin Shulman](#)
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NEW YORK, April 20 -- Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced a series of initiatives Monday to make New York City a national leader in volunteerism, a day before President Obama is expected to sign legislation expanding the number of federal public service jobs.

Bloomberg's initiatives include requiring all public school principals to create a plan to promote volunteering among schoolchildren and launching two campaigns: one to recruit volunteers and direct them to public agencies and nonprofit groups; the other to harness the professional skills of lawyers and financial advisers as counselors for families facing financial trouble.

Other programs include teaching CPR, encouraging the planting of gardens, organizing visits to homes of elderly people and painting murals. The city's Summer Youth Employment Program will now include a public service element, and New Yorkers may call the city's 311 citizen inquiry hotline to learn about volunteer opportunities.

The mayor said that such steps will make it easier for New Yorkers to pitch in and that their efforts can mitigate the impact of the global financial crisis on the city.

"This will unleash the power inside millions of New Yorkers to help those who need it most," said Bloomberg (I). "Together we'll be the first to bring to life a new era of service in America."

Obama is expected to sign the Serve America Act on Tuesday. The legislation will expand AmeriCorps, the national civilian service, from 75,000 to 250,000 positions a year.

Obama promised to make service a focus of his administration, after running a political campaign that relied heavily on the efforts of volunteers across the country. Many of his recruits were new to political participation.

Senior White House adviser Valerie Jarrett addressed the Manhattan crowd in a taped video, and she praised Bloomberg's efforts to rally volunteers.

"This is especially important in times like these where more people need help and we need more people to help," Jarrett said.

The setting inspired some to pledge new volunteering goals. The executive director of New York Cares said the group would mobilize 50,000 volunteers in the city in the coming year. A public school student from Brooklyn promised to plant trees to counter the effects of global warming.

Caroline Kennedy also spoke at the announcement on behalf of [Sen. Edward M. Kennedy](#) (D-Mass.), her uncle and the chief sponsor of the Serve America Act.

"Service has been my family's cause for decades," Caroline Kennedy said. "President Kennedy inspired a whole nation with a call to serve in his address," she said of her late father. Now Obama is also making that call, and Bloomberg's effort is a first step, she added.

Since January, New York City officials have met with about 700 organizations and conducted research among local volunteers to identify ways to make it easier for them to serve. One survey found that 17 percent of New Yorkers who want to volunteer do not know where to go to find opportunities.