

# RESPONDING TO PANDEMICS AND OTHER NATIONAL EMERGENCIES

Over the past two and a half years, the Commission has seen firsthand how service provides a means of addressing the needs of the nation and how Americans work together to meet common challenges. While unprecedented in many ways, the COVID-19 public health crisis is no exception. As public servants, military service members, medical professionals, national service volunteers, and others work tirelessly to overcome this pandemic, Congress and the President should also take steps to make America more prepared and resilient for the future. The Commission has multiple recommendations to better prepare the nation to respond to national emergencies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission proposes to strengthen national preparedness and national mobilization response, ensure government at all levels has the best talent and critical skills, modernize the Government's systems designed to respond to a crisis, and to expand and provide surge capacity to respond to national emergencies.

- **Strengthen the Nation's preparedness for emergencies.**
  - Designate officials in the Department of Defense and the National Security Council to lead national mobilization planning in response to a range of natural disasters and man-made emergencies.
  - Improve the readiness of the national mobilization system through whole-of-government leadership, regular exercises, and coordination with a wide range of public and private stakeholders.
  - Conduct regular evaluations of the Nation's mobilization readiness.
  - Establish a Council on Military, National, and Public Service in the Executive Office of the President to increase interagency coordination to coordinate deployment of service resources during national emergencies and enhanced workforce planning at agencies, including addressing critical workforce needs before a crisis occurs.
  - Create robust flexible work policies so agencies can quickly pivot to remote work in case of an emergency.
- **Place critical skilled personnel where they are needed.**
  - Develop voluntary mechanisms for accessing personnel in an emergency, including a critical skills Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and a national roster of volunteers.
  - Formalize a presidential call for volunteers, which would be an option for the nation to respond to a natural disaster, public health crisis, or other emergency.



# RECOMMENDATION SPOTLIGHT

- Enhance the Selective Service process and expand registration to all Americans, to ensure the nation is better prepared to meet critical needs in a national emergency if Congress and the President determine a military draft is required.
- Provide more flexibility for term appointments for federal agencies to retain employees needed in an emergency.
- Increase licensure portability for federal health care professionals so they can more easily practice across state lines.
- Establish a Civilian Cybersecurity Reserve to enable the federal government to surge its cyber workforce with experts capable of responding to pressing cyber-related needs.
- **Build a robust federal workforce by empowering agencies to attract and retain the best talent.**
  - Fix federal hiring processes—recruitment, assessment, preferences, and selection—and attract new generations to address staffing shortages and maintain a highly qualified workforce.
  - Replace the Veterans Health Administration’s three personnel systems with one streamlined system with competitive pay.
  - Ultimately, replace the current federal personnel system with a flexible, modern, talent-management approach where agencies can better compete with other employers, and easily attract and retain the talent they need to fulfill their missions.
- **Mobilize national service to address health, economic, and other national and local needs.**
  - Expand national service to support 1 million annual members by 2031 to enhance the nation’s ability to deploy national service resources to address a public health crisis or other national emergencies.
  - Establish a new national service fellowship program to build capacity for communities that otherwise may not have resources to address needs due to a public health crisis or other emergency.
  - Expand existing national service programs targeting opportunity youth, enabling more low-income young adults to gain workforce skills while providing needed services to communities impacted by pandemics or other emergencies.

