



Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act

New Law to Expand National Service, Create New Nonprofit Opportunities

By Varina Winder ¹
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Signed into law on April 21 by President Obama, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act will expand existing national service programs to create new jobs and service opportunities. Named after the ailing Democratic senator, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act reflects two different approaches to national service: expanding traditional, voluntary, part-time community service favored by Republicans as well as increasing government-subsidized, full-time programs, historically favored by Democrats. By taking advantage of such provisions as the Opportunity Corps, the Nonprofit Capacity Building Program and the Volunteer Generation Fund, Alliance and UNCA member agencies should benefit from new grant, volunteer management and social innovation opportunities.

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE BACKGROUND

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is an independent federal agency and the country's largest grant-making institution supporting national service and volunteer opportunities. By providing grants, training and technical assistance to State Service Commissions, State Education Agencies, national nonprofit organizations and private organizations, CNCS provides support for community initiatives that meet community needs and engage Americans in service.

CNCS currently administers three separate programs, leveraging about 1.5 million Americans each year in service projects.

AmeriCorps

There are three AmeriCorps programs: 1) AmeriCorps VISTA; 2) AmeriCorps NCCC; and 3) AmeriCorps State and National. Combined, the three programs mobilize 70,000 Americans in service work each year.² The largest program is State and National, which provides grants to public and nonprofit organizations to sponsor service programs throughout the country and to State Service Commissions, which provide CNCS funding to AmeriCorps local programs in their state through annual grant competitions. Organizations applying for grants through CNCS can do so through their eGrants website: <http://www.nationalservice.org/egrants/>. Detailed information about federal funding opportunities and eligibility requirements can be found here: http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/08_0531_nofa_ac.pdf. Information on the different national grant

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² For more specific information, see the AmeriCorps fact sheet, available online at: http://www.americorps.org/pdf/factsheet_ac.pdf >

opportunities can be found here: http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/07_0605_nofa_faq_chart.pdf. Applications for grants available through CNCS and State Service Commission collaborations can be made through the organization's State Service Commission; more information can be found here: <http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/statecommission.asp>.

AmeriCorps NCCC is a program for young Americans (ages 18-24) to live full-time in one of four AmeriCorps campuses and develop leadership and team-based skills. Members then partner with nonprofit and public organizations to complete service work across the country. Finally, AmeriCorps VISTA provides full-time volunteers to nonprofit organizations in order to expand programs aimed at alleviating poverty. Organizations applying for assistance through these two programs must contact either the AmeriCorps NCCC regional campus nearest to them (http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/nccc.asp) or the Corporation State Office (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>), respectively.

Senior Corps

The Senior Corps serves three programs: 1) Foster Grandparents; 2) the Senior Companion Program; and 3) Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and engages 500,000 Americans aged 55 or older each year. Through a combination of grants and volunteer service projects, the Senior Corps seeks to match older Americans with specific service projects that suit their skills, interests and abilities. Grantees, including local charities, schools, government agencies, faith-based organizations and other groups, use federal money to recruit, enroll and manage older volunteers. Organizations apply directly to CNCS through the eGrants website: <http://www.seniorcorps.gov/eGrants/index.asp>.

Learn and Serve America

The Learn and Serve America program seeks to provide support to schools, institutions of higher-education and community-based organizations in service-learning, which fuses classroom lessons with meaningful community work. Grantees, including State Education Agencies and nonprofit organizations, sometimes called intermediaries, must apply for funding through the eGrants website: <http://www.learnandserve.gov/eGrants/>. These entities may then make subgrants to schools and other community organizations to implement service-learning programs. Through a combination of grants, Technical and Training Assistance (through the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse) and various recognition and awards programs, the Learn and Serve America connects more than 1 million students with service projects to enhance their academic and civic skills.

MAJOR COMPONENTS OF EDWARD M. KENNEDY SERVE AMERICA ACT

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act will create new service and grant opportunities through all three of the above programs. Major components of the new service law include increasing AmeriCorps from 75,000 slots to 250,000 by 2017, expanding service-learning and engaging retiring and older Americans on a wide scale in service. It will also create five new service corps focused on education, unmet health needs, the environment, veterans' issues, and economically disadvantaged communities. The bill will also build the capacity of nonprofits, helping them to manage volunteers and expanding developmental assistance for small to midsize nonprofits.

Key Resources for Alliance/UNCA Members

The new law, effective October 1, 2009, contains many provisions that may be of interest to Alliance/ UNCA member agencies and other entities serving disadvantaged or economically distressed communities. By and large, organizations will be applying directly to CNCS for grants.

More specific information should be available in September 2009. Some of the new key resources of particular interest to Alliance and UNCA member agencies include:

- **Opportunity Corps:** The new law directs CNCS to establish five new accounts, including the Opportunity Corps, for grant-making to states and eligible nonprofits that will pay for the federal share of carrying out national service programs. Opportunity Corps grant recipients can use the funding to carry out activities to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged individuals. Allowable activities include providing financial literacy education, constructing, helping individuals to maintain and find housing, increasing access to health services for economically disadvantaged individuals and their children, connecting such persons with applicable federal and state benefit programs, facilitating job training and placement, eliminating hunger, improving access to technology and other activities as approved by CNCS. This flexibility should allow eligible nonprofits receiving grants to provide services as needed by their specific communities. States, tribes and private and public nonprofits may apply directly to CNCS for grants to support such programs. CNCS may also enter into a collaborative agreement with another federal agency to support national service programs through the agency. Federal agencies may then disburse funds via subgrants to the state or to nonprofit organizations. All funding is subject to appropriations. New grant opportunities should be announced through the CNCS website at: http://www.nationalservice.org/for_organizations/funding/nofa.asp.
- **Volunteer Generation Fund:** Subject to appropriation availability, CNCS is now allowed to make grants to State Commissions and nonprofit organizations to help entities recruit, coordinate, train and manage volunteers as part of a new program to support community-based entities with volunteer management. CNCS may determine the minimum grant amount, 50 percent of which will be allocated to State Commissions and nonprofit organizations and 50 percent of which will be allocated to each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. All applications must be submitted to CNCS. More information will likely be found on the CNCS New Funding Opportunities section of their website: http://www.nationalservice.org/for_organizations/funding/index.asp. More information on recruiting and finding volunteers may also be found here: http://www.nationalservice.org/for_organizations/volunteers/index.asp.
- **Social Innovations Funds Program:** This pilot program will provide up to \$100 million by 2014 for “social entrepreneurs” and nonprofit organizations developing innovative solutions to national and local challenges. The new law authorizes CNCS to make renewable five-year grants to eligible entities for amounts ranging from \$1,000,000 to \$10,000,000 per year. Grants may be used to serve a specific geographic area or issue. Allowable activities include improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged youth, child and youth development, improving access to health care services, reducing crime, resource conservation and environmental quality, reducing poverty and increasing civic engagement. All applications must be submitted to CNCS; for more information visit: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/>.
- **Youth Engagement Zone:** Local Education Agencies serving high-need areas and community-based or state entities engaging student and out-of-school youth in service learning may now apply to CNCS for competitive three-year grants to expand service-learning in their communities. Authorized activities include integrating service-learning into science, technology, engineering and mathematics curricula, involving students in energy conservation, emergency preparedness and disaster relief, improving access to emerging technologies, promoting mentoring of middle school youth by high schoolers, conducting research on service-learning, establishing summer of service programs for youth in grades 6 through 9, and establishing programs in areas where a majority of youth do not currently benefit from service-learning programs. Priority will be given to applicants proposing to involve students and other community stakeholders in the design

of the service-learning program, those carrying out the program in low-income areas and those using older volunteers, including retiring adults. A maximum of \$20,000,000 will be available to carry out this program. All applications must be submitted to CNCS, grants will likely be posted to the Learn and Serve America portion of the CNCS website:

<http://www.learnandserve.gov/egrants/>

- **Nonprofit Capacity Building Program:** The new law includes an authorization of \$5 million over five years (from 2010 to 2014) for nonprofit capacity building. The federal money will be distributed through matching three-year grants of not less than \$200,000 to “intermediary organizations,” including public charities and foundations with experience in providing developmental assistance, in each state. Grants may be used to pay for the federal share of the cost of organizational development assistance of small and midsize nonprofits. Organizational development assistance activities allowed under the grant could include financial planning, training on best practices, compliance with applicable tax laws and grantwriting.³ Preference will be given to grantees proposing to assist nonprofits facing significant resource challenges. All intermediary organizations must submit applications to CNCS; for more information see the CNCS grants website: <http://www.nationalservice.org/egrants/>.

Other Provisions

Other provisions of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act include:

Amendments to the National and Community Service Act of 1990

- Linking the full-time education award that national service participants receive upon completion of their program to the maximum authorized Federal Pell Grant award amount to keep up with rising college costs;
- Establishing a Summer of Service program to engage students in sixth through twelfth grade during their summer months in volunteer activities, allowing them to earn a \$500 per summer education award to be used for college costs (for no more than two terms);
- Establishing Campuses of Service, granting support for up to 25 higher education institutions with exemplary service-learning programs and to assist students in the pursuit of public service careers;
- Directing CNCS to establish five new accounts, including the Education Corps Fund (including arts and music), the Healthy Futures Corps Fund, the Clean Energy Corps Fund, the Veterans Service Corps and the Opportunity Corps (described earlier) from which CNCS can make grants to states and eligible nonprofits to pay for the federal share of carrying out national service programs;
- Expanding the National Civilian Community Corps, combining civilian and military service, to include a focus on disaster relief, energy conservation, infrastructure improvement and urban and rural development;
- Establishing a new National Service Reserve Corps comprised of national service volunteers and veterans to respond to disasters and emergencies in support of national service programs;

³ For more information, go to http://independentsector.org/programs/gr/Nonprofit_Capacity_Building.htm

- Directing CNCS to conduct a “Call to Service” campaign and establishing September 11th as a National Day of Service and Remembrance; and
- Creating new fellowships within the Investment for Quality and Innovation Program to engage social entrepreneurs, baby boomers, and older Americans in national service as follows:
 1. ServeAmerica Fellowship: ServeAmerica Fellows would propose their own plans for serving in their communities, addressing national needs. Fellows would be matched with a service sponsor.
 2. Silver Scholarship and Encore Fellowship: These programs would offer baby boomers and individuals 55 or older with expanded opportunity to transition into service post-career as well as entrance into new careers in the public or nonprofit sector.

Amendments under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act

- Revising parts of the VISTA program, the Senior Corps, the Foster Grandparents program and the Senior Companion program to make definitional and technical changes and to encourage collaboration between programs;
- Giving priority in VISTA participant selection to disadvantaged youth and older adults; and
- Raising the minimum and maximum VISTA stipend.

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About the Alliance for Children and Families and United Neighborhood Centers of America

The Alliance for Children and Families, a nonprofit association, was formed by the 1998 merger of Family Service America and the National Association of Homes and Services for Children. The Alliance represents over 370 nonprofit organizations across the nation that provide services and economic empowerment to children and families. Alliance agencies cover a wide spectrum of providers, including a diversity of faith-based organizations and nonsectarian agencies. Together, these organizations deliver more than \$2 billion annually in services to more than 8 million people in nearly 6,700 communities across the United States. More information about the Alliance is available at www.alliance1.org.

United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) is a voluntary, nonprofit, national organization with neighborhood-based member agencies throughout the United States. Formerly known as the National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, it was founded in 1911 by Jane Addams and other pioneers of the settlement movement. More information about UNCA is available at www.unca.org.

For more information, contact the Washington office of the Alliance and UNCA at:

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