

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

National and Community Service: Reauthorization of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973

Ann Lordeman
Specialist in Social Legislation
Domestic Social Policy Division

Summary

The major federally funded community service and volunteer programs in this country are authorized under two statutes: the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCSA), and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA). In general, the programs authorized by these statutes are administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency. On April 9, 2002, the President released "Principles and Reforms for a Citizen Service Act," to guide the reauthorization of NCSA and DVSA. On June 12, 2002, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce approved H.R. 4854, the Citizen Service Act of 2002. H.R. 4854 is based on the President's principles for reforming and enhancing these programs. This report provides selected highlights of H.R. 4854, and will be updated after major legislative developments.

Background

The major federally funded community service and volunteer programs are authorized under two statutes: the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCSA), and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA). In general, these programs are administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency. On April 9, 2002, the President released "Principles and Reforms for a Citizen Service Act," to guide the reauthorization of NCSA and DVSA. On June 12, 2002, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce approved H.R. 4854, the Citizen Service Act of 2002, which would amend and extend both acts.

Both NCSA and DVSA were last amended in 1993 by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-82). This act created: (1) the Corporation to administer NCSA and DVSA programs, (2) a new national service program referred to as AmeriCorps, (3) a National Service Trust to fund educational awards to persons

participating in AmeriCorps and other select community service programs, and (4) state commissions on national and community service to receive funding under NCSA. H.R. 4854 would represent the first reauthorization of the AmeriCorps program. Authorization of appropriations for the NCSA and DVSA programs expired at the end of FY1996. These programs continue to be funded, however, through annual appropriations legislation. H.R. 4854 would extend the authorization of appropriations for all NCSA and DVSA programs through FY2007. The focus of this report is on selected amendments H.R. 4854 would make to these two statutes.

For more information on current NCSA and DVSA programs, including annual funding from FY1994, see CRS Report RL30186, *Community Service: A Description of AmeriCorps, Foster Grandparents, and Other Federally Funded Programs*.

National and Community Service Act of 1990

Learn and Serve America (Title I-B). Learn and Serve refers to programs intended to benefit both communities and students. Under current law, of funds appropriated for the Learn and Serve program, 63.75% are for school-based programs, 11.25% are for community-based programs, and 25% are for higher education programs. Under H.R. 4854, 50% would be for school-based programs, 25% for community-based programs, and 25% for higher education programs.

Under current law, of the funds available for school-based programs, approximately 75% are allocated by formula to state educational agencies (SEAs) and approximately 25% are awarded competitively to SEAs, tribes, U.S. territories, and other entities. Under H.R. 4854, all of the school-based funds would be allocated by formula to SEAs. SEAs, as well as other entities, would be eligible to apply for competitive grants under a revamped community-based program.

H.R. 4854 would authorize \$55 million for FY2003, \$58 million for FY2004, \$61 million for FY2005, \$65 million for FY2006, and such sums as may be necessary for FY2007. The FY2002 appropriation and the FY2003 budget request are \$43 million.

AmeriCorps (Title I-C). AmeriCorps participants provide services that address unmet needs for the direct benefit of communities through local service programs operated by a wide range of organizations. In general, participants receive a living allowance and an educational award, and are 17 years of age or older.

Current law specifies how the Corporation allocates funds. Since FY1997, however, the appropriations bills have “capped” the amount that can be allocated for competitive grants to national organizations. The actual distribution of funds allocated by the Corporation for FY2002 is 33% for state formula grants, 1% for Indian tribes, 1% for U.S. territories, 44% for state competitive grants, and 21% for competitive grants to national organizations. Under H.R. 4854, 45% of the allocation would be state formula grants, 1% would be for Indian tribes, 1% for U.S. territories, at least 35% for state competitive grants, and up to 20% for competitive grants to national organizations.

H.R. 4854 would permit the Corporation to reserve funds for a “member-based” pilot program to “test new approaches to increasing and diversifying opportunities to serve in

approved national service positions.” H.R. 4854 would also include, as part of AmeriCorps, the “education award program,” in which the Corporation pays only for the education award and a fixed amount for operational support. This program is currently funded under Title I-H, which contains the authority for demonstration projects.

H.R. 4854 would authorize \$415 million for FY2003 for AmeriCorps (Subtitle C), the National Service Trust (Subtitle D), and Investment for Quality and Innovations (Subtitle H). Such sums as may be necessary would be authorized for each of the years FY2004 through FY2007. Of the amount appropriated for FY2003, not more than \$315.0 million could be used for AmeriCorps. The FY2002 appropriation for AmeriCorps is approximately \$249.5 million and the FY2003 budget request is approximately \$403.3 million.

National Service Trust (Title I-D). The National Service Trust is a special account in the U.S. Treasury from which educational awards are made to participants in AmeriCorps, the National Civilian Community Corps, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). The National Service Trust also pays interest on qualified student loans of participants who have obtained forbearance (i.e., postponement) in the repayment of their loans while participating in these programs. H.R. 4854 would permit the Corporation to use trust funds for two additional purposes. First, the Corporation could provide up to \$500 per student for service-based scholarships to high school students. The local share of a student’s scholarship would have to equal or exceed the Corporation’s share. Since FY1998, appropriations bills have allowed up to \$5.0 million in trust funds to be used each fiscal year for these scholarships. Second, the Corporation could use trust funds to award scholarships of \$1,000 to individuals 55 years of age and older who successfully completed 500 hours of service in not more than 1 year in a mentoring or tutoring program approved by the Corporation. This new **Senior Service Scholarship Program** would be authorized at \$12.0 million for FY2003 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the years FY2004 through FY2007 in a new Title I-J.

Under current law, the amount of an educational award for full-time service is \$4,725. (Pro-rated awards are also made for other terms of service, such as half-time.) H.R. 4854 would increase the award for full-time service to \$5,250. Also, current law specifies that an individual can receive a maximum of two educational awards, regardless of whether those awards were for full-time, part-time, or a combination of different terms of service. Under H.R. 4854, an individual could receive up to an amount equal to the aggregate value of two national educational awards for full time service.

National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) (Title I-E). CCC is a 10-month residential program for young adults ages 18-24 administered by the Corporation. Participants serve various communities in each of five regions, and receive a living allowance and an educational award. H.R. 4854 would allow the Corporation to use funds to make grants to support development and operation of an emergency response corps that would respond to natural and other disasters and support local communities in public safety, public health, and emergency preparedness. The emergency response corps could include residential programs.

H.R. 4854 would authorize \$30 million for FY2003 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the years FY2004 through FY2007. The FY2002 appropriation is \$25.0 million and the FY2003 budget request is \$35.0 million.

Accountability. In Title I-F, Administrative Provisions, H.R. 4854 would require that the Corporation establish, in consultation with grantees receiving assistance under NCSA and DVSA, performance measures for each grantee. H.R. 4854 would also require grantees to submit to the Corporation corrective plans if they failed to meet the established levels of performance, and would allow the Corporation to reduce or terminate the grant of an underperforming grantee. The Corporation would be permitted to reserve 1% of the total funds appropriated in a fiscal year for NCSA and DVSA to support program accountability activities.

America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth. Under a new Title I-K, H.R. 4854 would permit the Corporation to make grants to America's Promise, a non-profit organization, "to support its activities relating to mobilizing communities to ensure that young people become productive, responsible adults." The FY2001 and FY2002 appropriations bills included \$7.5 million for each fiscal year for this organization, the same amount as the authorization under H.R. 4854 for FY2003 and the FY2003 budget request. Such sums as may be necessary would be authorized for each of the years FY2004 through FY2007.

Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973

VISTA (Title I-A). VISTA volunteers work to alleviate poverty in communities by serving full time, with no outside commitments, for at least 1 year in poverty and poverty-related projects. To the maximum extent possible, they live among and at the economic level of the people they serve. Participants receive a living allowance and either a \$1,200 "lump sum" cash stipend or an educational award per year of service. H.R. 4854 would, over a 4-year period, eliminate the requirement that participants have no outside commitments to work or school. The total elimination of this requirement would be subject to a finding by the General Accounting Office (GAO) that the increased flexibility in VISTA has no adverse effect on the ability of the program to combat poverty and poverty-related problems.

H.R. 4854 would authorize \$90.0 million for FY2003 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the years FY2004 through FY2007. The FY2002 appropriation is approximately \$85.3 million and the FY2003 budget request is approximately \$94.3 million.

National Senior Volunteer Corps (Title II). The National Senior Volunteer Corps (Senior Corps) consists primarily of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), and the Senior Companion Program (SCP). Under current law, participants in RSVP must be at least 55 years of age or older and participants in FGP and SCP must be at least 60 years of age or older. Under H.R. 4854, individuals age 55 and older could participate in any of the three programs. Under current law, individuals whose income is 125% of the poverty level or less can receive a stipend in FGP and SCP. Under H.R. 4854, income eligibility would be raised to 200% of the poverty level. In addition, the Corporation could provide stipends to 15% of volunteers whose income was greater than 200% of poverty and who were serving in a FGP or SCP project if a grant recipient was "unable to effectively recruit and place low-income volunteers in the number of placements approved for the project."

H.R. 4854 would authorize approximately \$58.9 million for RSVP for FY2003, which is the same amount as the budget request for FY2003. The FY2002 appropriation is approximately \$54.9 million. The bill would authorize \$110.0 million for FGP for FY2003. The FY2002 appropriation and the FY2003 budget request are \$106.7 million. The bill would authorize approximately \$46.6 million for SCP for FY2003, the same as the budget request. The FY2002 appropriation is approximately \$44.4 million. For all three programs, such sums as may be necessary would be authorized for each of the years FY2004 through FY2007.