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The Corporation for National and Community Service: Overview of Programs and Funding

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Summary

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is an independent federal agency that administers the programs authorized by two statutes: the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCSA; P.L. 101-610), as amended, and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA; P.L. 93-113), as amended. NCSA and DVSA programs were substantially amended and reauthorized by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (P.L. 111-13). The report compares CNCS funding for FY2012, FY2013, FY2014, and FY2015.

The NCSA is designed to meet unmet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs and to renew an ethic of civic responsibility by encouraging citizens to participate in national service programs. The major programs authorized by NCSA include AmeriCorps State and National Grants and the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). The NCSA also authorizes the National Service Trust, which funds educational awards for community service participants.

A central purpose of the DVSA, which authorizes the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program and the National Senior Volunteer Corps, is to foster and expand voluntary service in communities while helping the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the elderly, and the poor. The DVSA also authorizes the National Senior Volunteer Corps, which includes three programs for senior citizens: the Foster Grandparent Program, the Senior Companion Program, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

Appropriations for the DVSA and the NCSA programs are made annually through the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (Labor-HHS-ED). CNCS programs are funded through the end of FY2015 under an omnibus appropriations law (P.L. 113-235), enacted just prior to the end of the 113th Congress. FY2015 funding for CNCS programs totals \$1.055 billion, \$5.0 million more than the FY2014 amount of \$1.050 billion.

This report will be updated as warranted by legislative developments.

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Background

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) was established by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-82). Operating as an independent federal agency, the CNCS oversees all national and community service programs authorized by the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCSA)¹ and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA).²

The NCSA and DVSA were last reauthorized by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (P.L. 111-13).³ Although authorization of appropriations under the Serve America Act expired in FY2014, NCSA and DVSA programs continued to receive funding through the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (Labor-HHS-ED).

Most Recent Developments

CNCS and other government programs were funded by a series of three continuing resolutions in early FY2015, until a final full-year omnibus appropriations bill was enacted on December 16, 2014 (P.L. 113-235). The final enacted appropriations law for FY2015 included \$1.055 billion for CNCS. The overall FY2015 funding level for CNCS is 0.48% above the FY2014 level of \$1.050 billion.

This report provides a summary of each NCSA and DVSA program and compares funding under Labor-HHS-ED in

- the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-74);
- the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-6);
- the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (P.L. 113-76); and
- the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (P.L. 113-235).

Program-by-Program Overview and Funding

NCSA Programs and Funding

On November 16, 1990, NCSA was signed into law to address unmet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs. One main purpose of NCSA is to renew an ethic of civil responsibility and community spirit in the United States by encouraging citizens to participate in national service programs. NCSA programs include Learn and Serve America (LSA), AmeriCorps State and National Grants, the National Service Trust, and the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). See **Table A-1** for NCSA funding information.

¹ National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCSA), P.L. 101-610.

² Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA), P.L. 93-113.

³ For more information, see CRS Report R40432, *Reauthorization of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (P.L. 111-13)*, by Ann Lordeman.

Learn and Serve America (Title I-B)⁴—Not Funded Since FY2010

Since 1990, NCSA has authorized community service programs benefitting students and communities through “service-learning,” which integrates community service projects with classroom learning. This program was last funded in FY2010 by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010 (P.L. 111-117).

AmeriCorps State and National Grants (Title I-C)⁵

Program Focus: Created in 1993, programs under AmeriCorps State and National Grants identify and address critical community needs, including tutoring and mentoring disadvantaged youth, managing or operating after-school programs, helping communities respond to disasters, improving health services, building affordable housing, and cleaning parks and streams. Grants include formula grants to states and territories, and competitive grants to states, territories, Indian tribes, and national non-profit organizations.

Volunteer Eligibility: Individuals aged 17 and older.

Amount of Volunteer Service: Full-time or part-time for a 9- to 12-month period.

Volunteer Benefits: Some full-time AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance, health coverage, and child care for those who qualify.⁶ Participants in AmeriCorps may receive educational awards for their service through the National Service Trust (see the following section of this report). AmeriCorps members can also obtain loan forbearance (i.e., postponement) in the repayment of their qualified student loans while participating in these programs and have the interest on their accrued loans paid from the trust once they earn an educational award.

Administrative Entity: Each state and territory governor appoints members of a service commission to manage, monitor, and administer annual grant applications for the state. CNCS reviews the state commission formula package and makes the awards. For multi-state or national awards, grantees are selected competitively by the CNCS headquarters office.

National Service Trust Education Awards (Title I-D)

The National Service Trust, a special account in the U.S. Treasury, provides educational awards for participants in AmeriCorps Grants, NCCC, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). An individual may not receive more than an amount equal to the aggregate value of two awards for full-time service.⁷

The educational award for full-time service is equal to the maximum amount of a Pell Grant in effect at the beginning of the federal fiscal year in which the Corporation approves the national service position. AmeriCorps members serving in programs funded in FY2015 will receive an education award of up to \$5,730, the current Pell Grant maximum. Pro-rated awards are also made for other terms of service, such as half-time (see **Table 1**). AmeriCorps members aged 55 or older at the beginning of a term of service may transfer the education award to a child, grandchild, or foster child. AmeriCorps State and National participants can serve a maximum of

⁴ In statute, Title I-B is titled “School-Based and Community-Based Service-Learning Programs.”

⁵ In statute, Title I-C is titled “National Service Trust Program.”

⁶ For more information on AmeriCorps benefits eligibility, see 42 U.S.C.A. §12594.

⁷ 42 USCS §12602 (c).

four terms of service.⁸ Full-time, half-time, reduced half-time, quarter time, and minimum time terms of service each count as one term of service.

In addition to education awards, the National Service Trust provides interest payments on qualified student loans to recipients of AmeriCorps Grants and participants in NCCC or VISTA who have obtained forbearance (postponement of loan repayment).

Table 1. Educational Awards by Service Term
(for programs funded with FY2015 appropriations)

Member Service Term	Number of Hours	Educational Award (\$)
Full time	at least 1,700	5,730.00
One-year half time	at least 900	2,865.00
Reduced half time	at least 675	2,182.78
Quarter time	at least 450	1,515.55
Minimum time	at least 300	1,212.44

Source: CNCS, Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity: AmeriCorps State and National Grants FY2015, p. 18, http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2015_AmeriCorps_Notice_NOFO_final.pdf.

National Civilian Community Corps (Title I-E)

Program Focus: NCCC is a full-time residential program that focuses on short-term projects that meet national and community needs related to disaster relief, infrastructure improvement, environment and energy conservation, environmental stewardship, and urban and rural development.

Volunteer Eligibility: Individuals aged 18 to 24. By statute (42 U.S.C.S. §12613(c)), the Corporation is required to take steps to increase the percentage of program participants who are disadvantaged to 50% of all participants.⁹

Amount of Volunteer Service: Participants can serve up to two years full time. Full-time service is defined as 10 months each year.

Volunteer Benefits: NCCC participants may receive a living allowance, room and board, limited medical benefits, and an educational award through the National Service Trust.

Administrative Entity: NCCC programs are administered by the CNCS.

Innovation, Demonstration, and Assistance Activities (I-H)

CNCS continues to have broad authority to fund a range of activities as authorized by Subtitle I-H, Investment for Quality and Innovation. The Serve America Act established the following programs.

⁸ Corporation for National and Community Service, Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/benefits_ed_award_details.asp.

⁹ “Disadvantaged youth” are defined at 42 U.S.C.S. §12511(b) as youth who are economically disadvantaged and one or more of the following: out-of-school youth, in or aging out of foster care, have limited English proficiency, homeless or have run away from home, at-risk to leave school without a diploma, juvenile offenders or at risk of delinquency, individuals with a disability.

Social Innovation Fund (SIF). The Social Innovation Fund leverages federal investments to increase state, local, business, and philanthropic resources to replicate and expand proven solutions and invest in the support of innovation for community challenges.¹⁰

Volunteer Generation Fund. The Volunteer Generation Fund awards competitive grants to state commissions and nonprofit organizations to develop and support community-based entities that recruit, manage, or support volunteers.¹¹

Innovation, Demonstration, and Call to Service. The corporation supports innovative initiatives and demonstration programs, such as the Call To Service, which would engage Americans in community needs, such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Day of Service and the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance.

DVSA Programs and Funding

In 1973, Congress passed the Domestic Volunteer Service Act (DVSA). The purpose of DVSA is to foster and expand voluntary citizen service throughout the nation. DVSA programs are designed to help the poor, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, and the elderly. Administered by the CNCS, DVSA programs include VISTA and the National Senior Volunteer Corps. See **Table A-1** for DVSA funding information.

VISTA (Title I-A)

Program Focus: The VISTA program encourages Americans to participate in community service in an effort to eliminate poverty.

Volunteer Eligibility: Individuals aged 18 and older.

Amount of Volunteer Service: VISTA members serve full time for up to five years.¹²

Volunteer Benefits: VISTA members may receive a living allowance, student-loan forbearance, health coverage, relocation costs, training, and child care assistance. VISTA members have the option of receiving an educational award, which is equivalent to the educational awards earned by AmeriCorps or NCCC members, or they may choose to receive an end-of-service lump sum stipend of \$1,500 instead. Like NCCC members, VISTA members receive an educational award based on the Pell Grant.¹³ Full-time, half-time, reduced half-time, quarter time, and minimum time terms of service each count as one term of service.

Administrative Entity: CNCS state offices.

¹⁰ For a list of grantees, and year grantees were selected, please see the Corporation for National and Community Service, Social Innovation Fund, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/social-innovation-fund/funded-organizations>.

¹¹ For information on FY2014 Funding for the Volunteer Generation Fund, see <http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2014/volunteer-generation-fund-fy14>.

¹² Memorandum of August 4, 2011, from Mary Strasser, AmeriCorps VISTA Director on Limits on Duration of Service for Members.

¹³ Corporation for National and Community Service, *Segal AmeriCorps Education Award*, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/segal-ameri-corps-education-award>.

National Senior Service Corps (Title II)

The National Senior Service Corps consists of three programs, summarized below: the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), and the Senior Companion Program (SCP).

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (Title II-A)

Program Focus: Volunteers in RSVP may play community service roles in education, health and nutrition services, community and economic development, and other areas of human need.

Volunteer Eligibility: Individuals aged 55 and older.

Amount of Volunteer Service: Participants can contribute up to 40 hours each week.

Volunteer Benefits: The RSVP offers no direct benefits (e.g., stipends or educational awards), with the exception of mileage reimbursement and insurance coverage during assignments.

Administrative Entity: CNCS state offices.

Foster Grandparent Program (Title II-B)

Program Focus: FGP participants support children with exceptional needs by providing aid and services. FGP participants mentor children and teenagers, teach model parenting skills, and help care for premature infants and children with disabilities.

Volunteer Eligibility: Individuals must be aged 55 or older to participate in FGP and meet income eligibility requirements to receive a stipend.

Amount of Volunteer Service: Volunteer schedules, which range from 15 to 40 hours each week, average 20 hours per week.

Volunteer Benefits: Income eligible participants may receive a tax-free hourly stipend. Participants may also receive mileage reimbursements and accident, liability, and automobile insurance coverage during assignments.

Administrative Entity: CNCS state offices.

Senior Companion Program (Title II-C)

Program Focus: SCP gives older adults the opportunity to assist homebound elderly individuals to remain in their own homes and to enable institutionalized elderly individuals to return to home care settings.

Volunteer Eligibility: Individuals must be 55 or older to participate in SCP and meet income eligibility requirements to receive a stipend.

Amount of Volunteer Service: Volunteer schedules, which range from 15 to 40 hours each week, average 20 hours per week.

Volunteer Benefits: Participants may receive a stipend. Participants may also receive mileage reimbursements and accident, liability, and automobile insurance coverage during assignments.

Administrative Entity: CNCS state offices.

Appendix. CNCS Program Funding

Table A-1. Corporation for National and Community Service Funding
(\$ in thousands)

Program (Authorizing Legislation)	FY2012 Appropriation	FY2013 Appropriation	FY2014 Appropriation	FY2015 Appropriation
AmeriCorps State and National Grants (NCSA Title I-C)	344,348	326,336	335,430	335,430
National Service Trust (NCSA Title I-D)	211,797	200,719	207,368	209,618
National Civilian Community Corps (NCSA Title I-E)	31,882	30,214	30,000	30,000
Innovation, Demonstration, and Assistance Activities (NCSA Title I-H)	53,280	50,493	79,900	77,400
—Innovation, Demonstration & Other (non-add)	4,481	4,246	3,100	3,600
—Social Innovation Fund (non-add)	44,815	42,471	70,000	70,000
—Volunteer Generation Fund (non-add)	3,984	3,776	3,800	3,800
State Commission Administrative Grants (NCSA Title I-C, Sec 126(a); and Title I-F, Sec 178)	13,441	12,738	15,038	16,038
Evaluation (NCSA Title I-F, Sec. 179)	2,994	2,838	5,000	5,000
Training and Technical Assistance (NCSA Title I-J)	1,996	1,892	0	0
VISTA (DVSA Title I-A)	94,820	89,861	92,364	92,364
National Senior Service Corps (DVSA Title II)	207,490	196,637	202,117	202,117
—Retired Senior Volunteer Program , RSVP (non-add)	50,204	47,578	48,903	48,903
—Foster Grandparent Program (non-add)	110,565	104,781	107,702	107,702
—Senior Companion Program (non-add)	46,722	44,278	45,512	45,512
Inspector General	3,992	3,784	5,000	5,250
Salaries and Expenses	82,843	78,510	80,737	81,737
Total	1,048,884^a	994,022^b	1,049,954	1,054,954

Source: Compiled by the Congressional Research Service based on data from the FY2014 Budget Chart for the Corporation for National and Community Service, the FY2015 Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, and the FY2015 Budget Chart for the Corporation for National and Community Service.

- a. Incorporated a 0.189% across the board rescission to all CNCS programs, pursuant to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-74).
- b. Incorporated a 0.2% across the board rescission to all CNCS programs per section 2004 (a) of the Full-Year Appropriations Act and a 5% reduction to account for sequestration as ordered by the Budget Control Act of 2011.

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