

Enhancing Senior Corps

Overview

The Corporation for National and Community Service administers the National Senior Service Corps, which provides opportunities for approximately 500,000 older Americans to serve their communities. The Senior Corps is comprised of three major programs: the ***Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)***; the ***Foster Grandparent Program***; and the ***Senior Companion Program***. The Corporation makes grants to nonprofit organizations and public entities to support these programs.

- ***RSVP*** matches older Americans who are willing to help with local problems in their communities. RSVP volunteers provide a wide range of important services, such as tutoring youth, responding to natural disasters, serving as citizen patrols for local police departments, teaching parenting skills to teen parents, getting children immunized, and mentoring troubled youth. RSVP volunteers serve without stipend for an average of four hours per week. To best meet the needs of their communities, RSVP volunteers choose how and where they serve.
- ***Foster Grandparents*** provide valuable assistance to children with exceptional needs. Foster Grandparents serve in schools, hospitals, drug treatment centers, correctional institutions, Head Start and day care centers. Foster Grandparents help abused and neglected children, mentor troubled teenagers and young mothers, and care for premature infants and children with disabilities.
- ***Senior Companions*** provide comfort to frail, homebound individuals, most of them elderly. These clients have difficulties with daily living tasks, and Senior Companions help them retain their dignity and independence.

In both the Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions programs, members have low-incomes, serve 20 hours per week, and receive a modest stipend of \$2.65 per hour. RSVP volunteers receive no allowance and may select their level of service.

As we look to the future and a rapidly expanding population of seniors interested in helping to meet community needs, we need to enhance the effectiveness of these programs and remove barriers that inhibit service opportunities. These efforts should build on the best from our past experience and incorporate emerging knowledge about the preferences, education, and capacities of the coming waves of retirees.

The Administration advocates the strengthening of senior service programs administered by the Federal government to enable more older Americans to have expanded opportunities to serve their communities.

Summary of Proposals

To strengthen service opportunities for our Nation's seniors, the President proposes the following reforms:

Reduce barriers for participation in all Senior Corps programs by lowering the age of eligibility from 60 to 55.

Currently, participants in Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions must be 60, while people can participate in RSVP beginning at age 55. The age of eligibility should be 55 for all Senior Corps programs.

Remove income eligibility limitations that restrict participation in Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions.

Removing the income eligibility restrictions will permit currently under-subscribed programs to be fully utilized, ensuring that more youth at risk and frail elderly can be served by our Nation's seniors. When lifting the income eligibility restrictions, the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service should be directed to ensure effective outreach to, and continued availability of, opportunities for persons with low incomes. Projects will have greater flexibility in making stipends available to volunteers, based on intensity of service, not income.

Permit innovations in programming.

The Administration proposes to add new flexibility to the Senior Corps by permitting, for example: (1) Foster Grandparents to provide a broader range of services to children, including to more than one child at a time; and (2) allowances for RSVP participants serving for lengthy periods of time.

Demand accountability for results.

Senior Corps grantees should have specific program objectives and accountability requirements. The Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service should be given statutory authority to: (1) work with the grantees to establish performance measures; (2) require corrective plans for those not meeting goals; and (3) reduce or terminate grants if corrections are not made.

Provide greater flexibility to local communities.

The Administration proposes to create greater flexibility in the use of Federal resources by easing requirements that govern the activities and support of volunteers. For example, under current requirements, seniors must serve 20 hours per week to participate in Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions. There should be more flexibility in the number of hours per week that individuals may serve.

Authorize grants to support a senior scholarships program.

The Administration supports the creation of a senior scholarships program to promote mentoring and tutoring by seniors, who may receive or transfer a \$1,000 “Silver Scholarship” to their children, grandchildren or another designated individual.

Authorize Appropriations.

The Administration urges the Congress to authorize a \$50 million increase from last year’s budget – the full funding of Senior Corps programs requested in the President’s FY 2003 budget. This increase in funding will permit participation to increase from 500,000 seniors per year to 600,000. The funds have been requested under “Special Volunteer Programs,” to permit flexibility in how the funds may be used.