

CRS Report for Congress

The Corporation for National and Community Service: Overview of Programs and FY2009 Funding

Updated March 19, 2008

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Prepared for Members and
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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 (NCSA, P.L. 101-610) of 1990, as amended, and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act (DVSA, P.L. 93-113) of 1973, as amended. This report first provides an overview of each NCSA and DVSA program and then compares CNCS funding from the FY2007 appropriation (P.L. 110-5), FY2008 appropriation (P.L. 110-161), and the FY2009 budget request.

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 NCSA authorizes four community service programs: Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps State and National Grants, the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), and the Points of Light Foundation. 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 National Senior Volunteer Corps includes three main programs: the Foster Grandparents 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). The FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161), enacted on December 26, 2007, provided \$856.3 million for CNCS. For FY2009, the President has requested \$829.7 million.

This report will be updated as warranted by legislative developments.

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The Corporation for National and Community Service: Overview of Programs and FY2009 Funding

Most Recent Developments

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008 (P.L. 110-161), signed by the President on December 26, 2007, funds the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) at \$856.3 million, which reflects a reduction of 1.747%, per Section 528(a) of the act. The President's FY2009 budget requests \$829.7 million.

Introduction

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 in two statutes: the National Community Service Act (NCSA) of 1990,¹ as amended, and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act (DVSA) of 1973,² as amended.

Although authorized funding for CNCS programs expired at the end of FY1996, funding continues through annual appropriations. DVSA programs have been continually funded under the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies (L-HHS-ED) Appropriations Act. Since FY2006, funding for NCSA programs have also been included in the L-HHS-ED appropriations.³

This report first provides a summary of each NCSA and DVSA program. Next, it compares funding under Labor-HHS-ED in:

- the FY2007 Continuing Appropriations Resolution (P.L. 110-5),
- the FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161), and
- the President's FY2009 Budget of the U.S. Government (request).

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

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

³ Prior to FY2006, funding for NCSA programs was under the Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development (VA-HUD) Appropriations Act.

Program-by-Program Overview and FY2009 Funding

NCSA Programs and Funding

On November 16, 1990, the National Community Service Act (NCSA) of 1990 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 U.S. by encouraging citizens to participate in national service programs. NCSA, as amended in 1993, includes Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps State and National Grants, the National Service Trust, National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), and the Points of Light Foundation. **Table 2** contains funding information for NCSA programs.

Learn and Serve America (Title I-B). *Program Focus:* Since 1990, Learn and Serve America (LSA) has authorized three community service programs benefitting students and communities. These programs provide for “service-learning” (i.e., student mentoring and tutoring) or collaborative efforts between schools and local communities addressing local community issues in areas such as education, public safety, human services, and the environment. The three programs are (1) school-based programs for students, (2) community-based programs for school-age young people, and (3) higher-education programs of community service for post-secondary students. *Eligibility:* elementary, secondary, and post-secondary students. *Benefits:* the Learn and Service America programs offer no stipends, educational awards, or other direct benefits. *Administrative Entity:* LSA programs are administered, depending on the program, by (1) CNCS, (2) an independent state education agency, (3) a state commission on national service, or (4) a public or private nonprofit organization.

AmeriCorps State and National Grants (Title I-C). *Program Focus:* 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. Created in 1993, AmeriCorps was developed as a network of local, state, and national service programs for individuals aged 17 and older. Grants include formula and competitive grants to states, national competitive grants to nonprofit organizations, grants to national and local organizations for the Education Award Program (EAP),⁴ and grants to U.S. territories and Indian tribes. *Eligibility:* individuals aged 17 and older. *Amount of Volunteer Service:* full-time or part-time for a nine- to 12-month period. *Benefits:* AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance and, in some cases, student-loan forbearance (i.e., loan postponement), health coverage, and child care for those who qualify. AmeriCorps members can

⁴ Education Award Programs (EAP) members receive educational awards and loan forbearance, if applicable, but do not receive other federally funded benefits such as a living allowance.

receive an educational award⁵ of up to \$4,725 per year of full-time service, the amount is reduced based on service term or part-time hours (see **Table 1**). *Administrative Entity:* Each state 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. CNCS selects all other grantees and makes the awards.

Table 1. Educational Awards by Service Term

Member Service Term	Number of Hours	Educational Award (\$)
Full time	at least 1,700	4,725.00
Half time	at least 900	2,362.50
Reduced half time	at least 675	1,800.00
Quarter time	at least 450	1,250.00
Minimum time	at least 300	1,000.00

Source: CNCS, FY2009 Congressional Budget Justification.

National Service Trust (Title I-D). The National Service Trust, a special account in the U.S. Treasury, provides a maximum of two educational awards per volunteer participant in AmeriCorps Grants, the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), and VISTA. The trust fund also provides funding for scholarships to high school students rewarded for outstanding community service. Additionally, 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 (loan postponement).

National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) (Title I-E). *Program Focus:* NCCC is a residential program that focuses on short-term projects such as building homes for low-income families and helping to provide disaster relief. *Eligibility:* individuals aged 18 to 24. *Amount of volunteer service:* participants can serve up to two years full-time. Full-time service is defined as 10 months each year. *Benefits:* NCCC participants may receive a living allowance, room and board, and an educational award of \$4,725 per year of service. *Administrative Entity:* NCCC programs are administered by the CNCS.

Program Update: the FY2007 Presidential budget proposed the elimination of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC).⁶ According to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) assessment, AmeriCorps NCCC was rated ineffective due to significant flaws in the program's design, performance, and cost effectiveness.

⁵ AmeriCorps Educational Awards are funded under the National Service Trust. These awards are intended to help pay qualified student loans, or finance college, graduate school, or eligible vocational training.

⁶ U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Program Assessment: AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps*, available at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/summary/10004457.2005.html>].

In response, the CNCS significantly restructured the NCCC as a less expensive program predominately focused on disaster relief and recovery⁷. Although the NCCC closed two of its five campuses in FY2007, Washington, D.C. and Charleston, S.C., Congress provided start-up funding in FY2008 for two new residential campuses: Vinton, IA, and in Vicksburg, MS. The three remaining NCCC campuses are in Sacramento, CA, Denver, CO, and Perry Point, MD. Despite the decrease in the FY2009 requested funding, 59% less than the FY2008 level, or \$9.836 million, the CNCS plans to implement a private sector fund-raising strategy for the NCCC to keep the number of member service years (MSY) at 1,120, the same as the FY2008 level.⁸

In FY2007, the NCCC began a new residential program, a Summer of Service, targeted to 250 youth from disadvantaged circumstances (between the ages of 14 and 17) in New Orleans, LA, Denver, CO, and Charleston, SC. The three-week program contains projects in areas such as education, the environment, and hurricane recovery. CNCS estimated that 250 youth will also participate in the program in FY2008 and proposes 300 participants for FY2009.⁹

Points of Light Foundation (Title III). The Points of Light Foundation is a nonprofit charitable organization that functions as an independent and autonomous entity. The foundation promotes community service through a partnership with the Volunteer Center National Network. The purposes of the Points of Light Foundation are to (1) encourage all Americans to help solve critical social problems by volunteering, (2) identify successful and promising community service projects and disseminate information about them, and (3) discover new leaders and develop individuals and institutions that serve as examples of commitment to others.

Program Update: Prior to and including FY2007, funds were designated for the Points of Light Foundation during the annual appropriations process. In FY2008, previous partnership grantees, including the Points of Light Foundation, will be eligible to compete for merit-based grants as funded under Subtitle-H, the Innovation, Demonstration, and Assistance Activities.¹⁰ For FY2009, the Points of Light may be eligible to compete for new competitive award(s) or continue a multi-year grant awarded competitively in FY2008.¹¹

⁷ The Corporation for National and Community Service, *FY2008 Congressional Budget Justification*, available at [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/2008_budget_justification.pdf].

⁸ A Member Service Year is the equivalent of one full time term of service.

⁹ Correspondence to CRS from the Corporation for National and Community Service, March 12, 2008.

¹⁰ The Joint Explanatory Statement, *Congressional Record*, daily edition (December 17, 2007), p. H16282.

¹¹ The Corporation for National and Community Service, *FY2009 Congressional Budget Justification*, p. 64, available at [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/2009_budget_justification.pdf].

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, the DVSA programs include the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and the National Senior Volunteer Corps. The National Senior Volunteer Corps consists of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program. **Table 2** contains funding information for DVSA programs.

VISTA (Title I-A). *Program Focus:* the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program encourages Americans to participate in community service in an effort to eliminate poverty. *Eligibility:* individuals aged 18 and older. *Amount of volunteer service:* VISTA members serve full-time for up to three years. *Benefits:* VISTA members may receive a living allowance, student-loan forbearance (i.e., postponement), health coverage, relocation costs, training, and child care assistance. VISTA participants receive an educational award of up to \$4,725 per year of full-time service or a \$1,200 “lump sum” cash stipend from the National Service Trust. The maximum number of educational awards per participant is two; the maximum number of lump-sum payments per participant is three. *Administrative Entity:* CNCS state offices.

National Senior Volunteer Corps (Title II). The National Senior Volunteer Corps consists of three programs, summarized below: the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), and the Senior Companion Program (SCP). The FY2009 Presidential budget request is \$174 million for all three programs comprising the Senior Corps, reflecting an overall decrease of approximately 19%. Specifically, the Foster Grandparent Program would be reduced by 38%, while the Senior Companion Program would remain the same and funding for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program would increase by 2%.

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) (Title II-A). *Program Focus:* volunteers in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) may play community service roles in education, health and nutrition services, community and economic development, and other areas of human need. *Eligibility:* individuals aged 55 and older. *Amount of volunteer service:* participants can contribute up to 40 hours each week. *Benefits:* the RSVP offers no direct benefits (e.g., stipends or educational awards). *Administrative Entity:* CNCS state offices.

Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) (Title II-B). *Program Focus:* the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) supports children with exceptional needs by providing aid and services. FGP members mentor children and teenagers, teach model parenting skills, and help care for premature infants and children with disabilities. *Eligibility:* individuals must be 60 or older and meet income eligibility requirements. *Amount of volunteer service:* volunteer schedules, which range from 15 to 40 hours each week, average 20 hours a week. *Benefits:* if qualified, members may receive a stipend of \$2.65 an hour. Members may also receive mileage reimbursements and accident, liability, and automobile insurance coverage during assignments. *Administrative Entity:* CNCS state offices.

Senior Companion Program (SCP) (Title II-C). *Program Focus:* the Senior Companion Program (SCP) gives older adults the opportunity to assist frail, homebound individuals, most of whom are elderly. SCP volunteers help with such tasks as finding transportation to medical appointments, paying bills, and buying groceries. *Eligibility:* individuals must be 60 or older and meet income eligibility requirements. *Amount of volunteer service:* volunteer schedules, which range from 15 to 40 hours each week, average 20 hours a week. *Benefits:* participants receive a stipend of \$2.65 an hour. Members may also receive mileage reimbursements and accident, liability, and automobile insurance coverage during assignments. *Administrative Entity:* CNCS state offices.

**Table 2. Corporation for
National and Community Service Funding**

(in thousands of dollars)

Programs	FY2007 Approp.	FY2008^a Approp.	FY2009 Request
Learn and Serve America (NCSA Program)	37,125	37,459	32,099
AmeriCorps State and National Grants (NCSA Program)	264,825	256,805	274,185 ^b
National Service Trust (NCSA)	117,720	122,539	132,110
National Civilian Community Corps (NCSA)	26,789 ^c	23,782	9,836
Innovation, Demonstration, and Assistance Activities (NCSA)	29,771 ^d	18,893	20,460
— <i>Points of Light Foundation (NCSA)(non-add)</i>	9,900	0 ^e	0 ^f
Evaluation (NCSA)	3,960	3,891	4,500
State Commission Administrative Grants (NCSA)	12,516	11,790	12,642
VISTA (DVSA)	95,468 ^c	93,800	91,618
VISTA Revolving Fund ^e (DVSA)	3,500 ^g	0	0
National Senior Volunteer Corps (DVSA)	217,586	213,785	174,003
— <i>Foster Grandparents Program (non-add)</i>	110,937	108,999	68,174
— <i>Senior Companion Program (non-add)</i>	46,964	46,144	46,144
— <i>Retired Senior Program (non-add)</i>	59,685	58,642	59,685
Inspector General	4,963 ^c	5,828	6,512
Salaries and Expenses	70,324 ^{c d}	67,759	71,715
Total	884,547	856,331^a	829,680

Sources: Funding for the FY2007 and FY2008 appropriations and the presidential budget request for FY2009 are compiled from the FY2009 Congressional Budget Justification, the Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007 (P.L. 110-5), and from information provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

- a. FY2008 funding reflects a 1.747% reduction per Section 528(a) of P.L. 110-161.
- b. The budget request would include up to \$2 million for a pilot program of “member-based service” within the AmeriCorps State and National Grants program.
- c. Includes a pay raise adjustment per P.L. 110-5.
- d. \$1.360 million was transferred from Innovation, Demonstration, and Assistance to the Salaries and Expenses account pursuant to the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007, P.L. 110-28.
- e. In FY2008, the Points of Light Foundation, as authorized under Title III of the National and Community Service Act of 1990, will be eligible to compete for merit-based grants as funded under Subtitle-H, the Innovation, Demonstration, and Assistance Activities, see the Joint Explanatory Statement, *Congressional Record*, daily edition (December 17, 2007), p. H16282.
- f. For FY2009, the Points of Light will be eligible to compete for new competitive award(s), or continue a multi-year grant awarded competitively in FY2008.
- g. The VISTA Revolving fund advanced funds to VISTA grantees who assume a portion of the costs of supporting VISTA members. Funds are advanced so that a VISTA member can receive one check from the Corporation — rather than one from the Corporation and one from the grantee — for a “subsistence” allowance and so that grantees can reimburse the Corporation throughout the year.