

## Summary of Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act Mentoring Provisions

President Obama signed the historic Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act into law as Public Law 111-13 on April 21, 2009. Prior to that, the House and Senate, unified on the importance of this legislation, acted swiftly to construct, consider, and pass the package: initial House passage occurred on March 18, 2009, by a vote of 321-105; Senate passage followed on March 26, 2009, by a vote of 79-19; and the House finally agreed to the Senate's amendments on March 31, 2009, by a vote of 275-149.

MENTOR worked diligently to ensure the inclusion of mentoring provisions in the Serve America Act, building on efforts begun in 2007. In the end, the new law incorporated new provisions for mentoring programs and *Mentoring Partnerships* (indicated in red) so that these entities would have access to new streams of funding through the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The following is a summary of relevant provisions, based on H.R. 1388 as passed by the Senate and House (P.L. 111-13 is currently unavailable online in final form) and a summary of the Act by CNCS.

*A note on funding.* This first but major step was the authorization of changes in and additions to current law. Now, the package must face the appropriations process, where Congress can decide to fund the package as passed and requested by President Obama in his FY 2010 budget in entirety, or they may rearrange priorities across the board. Federal appropriations bills only last a single appropriations cycle (one year), so this is an effort that must be pursued every year. Thus far for FY 2010, MENTOR has submitted testimony to the House and Senate Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Subcommittees supporting funding for the entire package, especially provisions that would provide new resources for mentoring.

### Learn and Serve America

**School-Based.** For mentoring programs working in partnership with school-based service-learning programs, the Act provides assistance to States, territories, or Indian tribes for planning and building the capacity to implement service-learning programs that are based principally in elementary schools and secondary schools. This includes:

- assistance for local partnerships with community partners, such as non-profit organizations, as well as,
- consideration in selecting school-based grantees for involvement of disadvantaged youth, in addition to factors such as innovation, sustainability, capacity building, and program quality.

**Higher Education.** For higher education institutions – individually or as a consortium, or in partnership with public or private nonprofit organizations – the Act adds language to promote service-learning in elementary and secondary schools and tie projects to crime prevention. The positive youth development work of mentoring programs can relate to this priority, as a means of helping to divert youth from making poor decisions and risk entering the criminal justice system.

**Innovative Service-Learning Programs and Research.** Community-based funding is authorized to integrate service-learning into various areas, including projects where high

school students mentor middle school youth “to seek to meet unmet human, educational, environmental, public safety, or emergency and disaster preparedness needs in their community.” Priority will be given to programs that involve students, community stakeholders, and adult volunteers in program design and low-income rural or urban communities. The Act also authorizes:

- a “**summer of service**” program including a \$500 education award (up to \$750 for disadvantaged youth) for rising 6-12 graders who complete 100 hours in an approved position – this program could suit appropriate mentees identified by mentoring programs;
- a “**semester of service**” program under which high school students – targeted at economically-disadvantaged students – engage in service-learning for at least 70 hours in a semester – which could include peer-to-peer mentoring; and
- a “**Youth Engagement Zones**” grant program through which grants can be made to eligible partnerships to carry out school- or community-based service-learning programs with secondary school students and out-of-school youth to address specific community challenges – this could involve peer mentors and mentees alike.

### **National Service Trust Program (Including AmeriCorps)**

**Education Corps.** The Act creates an Education Corps to identify and meet unmet educational needs within communities through various activities such as mentoring students, including adult or peer mentoring.

**Healthy Futures Corps.** The Act creates a Healthy Futures Corps to identify and meet unmet health needs within communities through activities such as those to address childhood obesity through in-school and after-school physical activities, and providing nutrition education to students, in elementary schools and secondary schools. This could apply to certain mentoring programs, depending on their range of mentor/mentee activities.

**Clean Energy Service Corps.** The Act creates a Clean Energy Service Corps to identify and meet unmet environmental needs within communities through activities such as working with schools and youth programs to educate students and youth about ways to reduce home energy use and improve the environment; assisting in the development of local recycling programs; renewing and rehabilitating forests, parks, trails, and rivers; or providing service through a full-time, year-round youth corps program or full-time summer youth corps program, such as a conservation corps or youth service corps program. This may apply to certain mentoring programs depending on their areas of focus or mentor/mentee pairs depending on their areas of interest.

**Veterans Corps.** The Act creates a Veterans Corps to identify and meet unmet needs of veterans and members of the Armed Forces who are on active duty through activities such as assisting veterans in developing mentoring relationships with economically disadvantaged students. The number of veterans involved in such relationships is used as a key indicator of this new Corps.

**Opportunity Corps.** The Act creates an Opportunity Corps to identify and meet unmet needs relating to economic opportunity for economically disadvantaged individuals within communities. Nearly all of the named activities could fit certain mentoring programs

depending on their focus (e.g., financial literacy, helping families find or build affordable housing, alleviating hunger, helping with job search and placement, increasing access to technology).

**National Service Programs.** The Act expands the lists of illustrative AmeriCorps programs to include new authority for *Mentoring Partnerships* and mentoring programs to apply for funding through direct grants. These grants are specified to go toward (specific statutory language cited here):

“(C) A program that seeks to expand the number of mentors for disadvantaged youths and other youths (including by recruiting high school-, and college-age individuals to enter into mentoring relationships), either through—

“(i) provision of direct mentoring services;

“(ii) provision of supportive services to direct mentoring service organizations (in the case of a partnership);

“(iii) the creative utilization of current and emerging technologies to connect youth with mentors; or

“(iv) supporting mentoring partnerships (including statewide and local mentoring partnerships that strengthen direct service mentoring programs) by—

“(I) increasing State resources dedicated to mentoring;

“(II) supporting the creation of statewide and local mentoring partnerships and programs of national scope through collaborative efforts between entities such as local or direct service mentoring partnerships, or units of State or local government; and

“(III) assisting direct service mentoring programs.”

These grants may also go toward mentoring programs, including a stated priority about the recruitment of retirees as mentors:

“(D) A program—

“(i) in which not less than 75 percent of the participants are disadvantaged youth;

“(ii) that may provide life skills training, employment training, educational counseling, assistance to complete a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, counseling, or a mentoring relationship with an adult volunteer; and

“(iii) for which, in awarding financial assistance and approved national service positions, the Corporation shall give priority to programs that engage retirees to serve as mentors.”

The list of AmeriCorps programs is also expanded to include *Mentoring Partnerships* and mentoring programs that work with foster care youth:

“(H) A program that seeks to expand the number of mentors for youth in foster care through—

“(i) the provision of direct academic mentoring services for youth in foster care;

“(ii) the provision of supportive services to mentoring service organizations that directly provide mentoring to youth in foster care, including providing training of mentors in child development, domestic violence, foster care, confidentiality requirements, and other matters related to working with youth in foster care; or

“(iii) supporting foster care mentoring partnerships, including statewide and local mentoring partnerships that strengthen direct service mentoring programs.”

## **National Civilian Community Corps**

The Act strengthens the focus for the National Civilian Community Corps program on the recruitment of disadvantaged youth as participants. Specifically, for summer programs,

at least 50% of participants must be from economically and ethnically diverse backgrounds, including foster care youth. Depending on the focus of mentoring programs, this may present the NCCC as an attractive opportunity to certain mentees.

### **Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)**

The Act includes additional VISTA programming models, including "initiating and supporting before-school and after-school programs, serving children in low-income communities, that may engage participants in mentoring, tutoring, life skills and study skills programs, service-learning, physical, nutrition, and health education programs, and other activities addressing the needs of the children."

### **National Senior Service Corps**

At least 25% of grants under Programs of National Significance must be to organizations currently not receiving Corporation assistance and when possible in locations where no Senior Corps projects operate. The Act adds to the list of programs those that establish and support mentoring programs for low-income youth, including mentoring programs that match such youth with mentors and match such youth with employment and training programs, including apprenticeship programs.

### **Volunteer Generation Fund**

The Act authorizes a Volunteer Generation Fund to provide grants to State Commissions and nonprofit organizations for them to develop and carry out volunteer programs and make subgrants to support and create new local community-based entities that recruit, manage, or support volunteers. This includes MPs, as intermediaries that work to recruit volunteer mentors. Of the funds allocated, 50% will be provided as formula grants to States and 50% on a competitive basis to State Commissions and nonprofits. A 20% match will be required in the first year, increasing to 50% for year four and beyond.

### **Nonprofit Capacity Building Program**

The Act authorizes grants of at least \$200,000 to intermediary organizations to support the provision of organizational development assistance – including training on best practices, financial planning, grantwriting, and compliance with applicable tax laws – to small and mid-size nonprofit organizations, particularly those facing resource hardship challenges. Certain *Mentoring Partnerships* could be eligible for this funding. The federal share will be, at most, 50%.

### **Relief for Distressed Communities**

The Act includes special treatment related to required federal matching funds for distressed communities, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a severely economically distressed community that receives assistance from the Corporation for any program under the national service laws shall not be subject to any requirements to

provide matching funds for any such program, and the Federal share of such assistance for such a community may be 100 percent.” Such communities include areas with a foreclosure rate, home price decline, and unemployment rate above national averages over the last year, or areas that lack basic living necessities such as water and sewer, electricity, paved roads, and safe/sanitary housing. Given that federal matching requirements can be a deterrent for nonprofits to pursue national service funding, particularly AmeriCorps funding, this could greatly assist programs located in severely distressed communities.