

## April 2009 Edition, The Heart Line

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### **President Obama signs Serve America Act**

*Historic Bipartisan Expansion of National Service*



On April 21, President Barack Obama signed into law the most sweeping expansion and reform of national service programs in a generation -- the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The United States Senate voted to pass the law with a 79-19 vote on March 26, following House action the previous week.

President Obama praised Congress' bipartisan work, saying "I want to applaud all those who have worked so

hard to see this bill through...this legislation will help create new opportunities for millions of Americans at all stages of their lives."

"Our work is not finished when I sign this bill into law – it has just begun. While our government can provide every opportunity imaginable for us to serve our communities, it is up to each of us to seize those opportunities. I call on all Americans to stand up and do what they can to serve their communities, shape our history and enrich both their own lives and the lives of others across this country."

The legislation updates and strengthens national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, (CNCS) a federal agency created in 1993. The Corporation engages 4 million Americans in result-driven service each year, including 75,000 AmeriCorps members, 492,000 Senior Corps volunteers, 1.1 million Learn and Serve America students, and 2.2 million additional community volunteers mobilized and managed through the agency's programs.

The law expands service opportunities and strengthens program management by:

- Putting AmeriCorps on a growth path from its current level of 75,000 to 250,000 annual members, with focus on priority needs including advancing student achievement and graduation, providing economic opportunity, increasing energy efficiency, improving health care access, and enhancing service opportunities for veterans;
- Increasing the amount of the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award that AmeriCorps members receive after completing their term of service from \$4,725 to the Pell Grant amount of \$5,350;
- Strengthening the nation's civic infrastructure through creation of a Social Innovation Fund to provide seed money and increase innovative and

evidence-based initiatives and a Volunteer Generation Fund to award grants to nonprofits and states to recruit, manage, and support volunteers;

- Providing incentives for middle and high school students to engage in service through a Summer of Service program and authorizes higher education institutions to be eligible for grants to encourage students to engage in service during school and in their future careers; and
- Expanding service opportunities for older Americans by extending eligibility requirements for the Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent programs, introducing competition into the Retired Senior Volunteer Program to better position the program for expansion, and creating other opportunities for Baby Boomers and other older Americans to transition into post-career service opportunities.

The early focus on bipartisan national service legislation comes as the economic downturn increases demands on the nonprofit sector and as AmeriCorps experiences a spike in applications and interest. In February, there were 9,731 applications submitted to the AmeriCorps online application system, more than triple the 3,159 submitted during the same time period last year.

“Reauthorization has been on the table for about 10 years, so this was a long time coming. To say we are excited about the expansion is an understatement; we are thrilled and look forward to more AmeriCorps members serving in Kentucky,” said Eileen Cackowski, Director, Kentucky AmeriCorps. “Members go about their service in 80 of Kentucky’s 120 counties with dedication, purpose and little fanfare; which makes the new possibilities offered by the Act all the more exciting.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to increase educational scholarships, expand member training and implement many new programs to serve Kentuckians. We are grateful for President Obama’s leadership on this issue and thankful that Congress looked at this in a bipartisan way and acted as a unified body to benefit all Americans,” said Cackowski.

CNCS is a federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year, the Corporation engages 4 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America programs. For more information, visit the CNCS Web site.

## **Volunteer Week in Kentucky**



Gov. Steve Beshear has proclaimed April 19-25 as Volunteer Week in the commonwealth.

“Volunteerism, community service and neighbor-helping-neighbor are cornerstones of Kentucky culture, and every day, volunteers across Kentucky serve without compensation to meet vital needs that may otherwise fall through the cracks,” Beshear said.

From teaching children to read and making neighborhoods safer, to protecting vital natural resources and building affordable housing, volunteers enrich the lives of others and contribute real value to the state's financial and social stock.

"Because government, by itself, cannot solve all social problems, volunteers are among our greatest treasures and are vital to our future as a caring, productive society," Beshear said. "I'm pleased to proclaim Volunteer Week as a way to acknowledge Kentucky's long tradition of neighborliness and to honor the thousands of Kentuckians who give money, time and talent daily to make a difference all across this state."

A 2008 study by the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center reveals that 66 percent of Kentuckians volunteer. The estimated value of an hour of volunteer service is \$19.51, according to The Independent Sector, a national advocacy group for volunteers and community service groups.

The Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) in the Cabinet for Health and Family Services administers Kentucky's AmeriCorps national service program and supports state volunteerism.

Sometimes called the domestic Peace Corps, AmeriCorps engages members in intensive community service. Currently, 270 AmeriCorps members serve with 12 AmeriCorps programs responding to unmet needs in Kentucky communities.

KCCVS also sponsors the Volunteer Recognition Program, which provides certificates and citations of achievement and appreciation signed by the governor for volunteers with nonprofit organizations.

Founded in 1997, the program continues to gain popularity. In 2008, more than 3,000 certificates and citations were issued, a 57 percent increase from 2007.

CHFS Press Release 4-14-09

## **2009 AmeriCorps Midwinter Training**

*Submitted by Melissa Newton, KCCVS Training Officer*



Three separate events were held around Kentucky to provide training for the Kentucky AmeriCorps members. We began at a bracing 12 degrees on March 3, with more than 80 members and program staff from the eastern side of the state gathered at Blue Licks State Park for a variety of training sessions including stress management, an overview of national service, and civic engagement.

On March 5, the members and staff from the west gathered at Rough River State Park. They enjoyed the scenery while learning about potential disasters in western Kentucky, stress reduction techniques and time management. Then, on March 10, the members and staff from the southern reaches of Kentucky came together at Lake Cumberland State Park for sessions on stress management and civic engagement. By this point, it was about 70 degrees and the daffodils were in bloom, so we renamed the event "End of Winter" training.

In addition to the above mentioned sessions, all three events included an in-depth training session about suicide prevention using the Question, Persuade and Refer method taught by Michael McFarland of the Department for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addiction Services. Although it was a difficult subject to discuss, the response from the members and staff was mostly positive. One attendee even reports that the information she received was very helpful in gaining some closure on her family member's suicide. Another reports the information will be very helpful as she works with teenagers.

### **MSU Receives Grant from State Farm Insurance**



Morehead State University's MSU Corps and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) have received a \$2,500 grant to offset the cost of emergency supply kits thanks to State Farm Insurance.

The kits are meant for senior citizens and K-12 schools across eastern Kentucky. Specifically, the money will buy windup radios that can be used when the power goes out. With just one minute winding, listeners can tune in for up-to-date information during an emergency situation.

MSU Corps members, RSVP volunteers, MSU Center for Regional Engagement and MSU Student Support Services kicked off the 2009 Martin Luther King Day of Service by hosting collection events for donations of supplies for the kits as well as providing workshops for students, parents and community members about Emergency Preparedness.

MSU's Center for Regional Engagement and Student Activities Council donated 30 emergency kits for MSU Corps members to place at school sites where they are serving as well as gave six kits to the RSVP program to be placed in the senior citizen centers. The remaining unfinished kits were assembled thanks to donations from community businesses throughout the region.

MSU Corps member Sharon Hignite wrote State Farm requesting assistance because there was insufficient funding/or donations for the windup radios.

Working in collaboration with all partners made this project a huge success for our region. The kits included windup radios, first aid supplies, granola bars, water, and safety whistles.

"Having access to radio communication is essential for the safety of the kit recipients," said Sherrie Bennett, director of MSU Corps. "We really appreciate State Farm's support of this project."

The windup radios will be distributed to various schools and senior citizen centers in Bath, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Rowan, Lewis, Lawrence, Mason, Boyd, Greenup, and Carter counties.

Adapted from Morehead State University News Release 4-10-09

## **Conference Call Etiquette**

*Submitted by Melissa Newton, KCCVS Training Officer*



With shrinking travel budgets and organizations being asked to do more with less, you might be seeing an increase in the number of invitations to join conference calls.

Conference calls are a cost-effective way to share information and discuss projects with colleagues in different locations. However, there are certain points of etiquette that should be followed when participating on these calls. To ensure an efficient and enjoyable call please keep the following items in mind:

- Join the call on time – each time a participant joins the call there is a signal that can be very distracting to those already on the call.
- Use the mute function – if you are listening and not discussing, push \*6 so that your line is on mute. You can un-mute your line to add to the discussion by pushing #6. This cuts down on the amount of background noise that can be heard on the call.
- Never put your phone on hold – everyone on the call hears the organization's hold music or beep.
- If you are not on mute and there is more than one person in the room with you, do not hold side conversations. Always assume that someone can hear what you are saying.
- When you begin to speak, identify yourself so that everyone knows who is speaking.

You may also find yourself hosting a conference call to disseminate information or gather feedback from stakeholders. Here are a few rules of etiquette to consider:

- Value the participants by starting the call on time.
- Ask for attendance or do a roll call so that everyone knows who is present on the call.

- If at all possible, send out an agenda ahead of the call and then stick to that agenda.

Conference calls can be a great way to save on travel costs and still share information or gather feedback in a timely fashion. If we all remember these etiquette guidelines, calls can be efficient, effective and maybe even fun!

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"...no matter how big government gets, and no matter how many services it provides, it can never take the place of volunteers."

- Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S. president (1911-2004)

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### **Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service**

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