

UNITED STATES  
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

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MAR 16 1976

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# REPORT TO THE CONGRESS



BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES



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## ACTION's Progress Toward Meeting The Goals Of Its Establishment

(B) ACTION was established to accomplish six goals for strengthening and expanding Federal volunteer services to their maximum potential, both at home and abroad. *These goals are:*

To this end, ACTION has been particularly successful in expanding volunteers among older persons.

ACTION should be closely watching new test programs to assure those with high potential become operational.

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MARCH 15, 1976



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-165743

To the President of the Senate and the  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

This report assesses ACTION's progress in meeting its six goals designated by the President when he established the agency in 1971.

We made our review pursuant to the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921 (31 U.S.C. 53), and the Accounting and Auditing Act of 1950 (31 U.S.C. 67).

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget and the Director of ACTION.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James B. Stults".

Comptroller General  
of the United States

C o n t e n t s

		<u>Page</u>
DIGEST		i
CHAPTER		
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	Organization	2
	ACTION programs as of June 30, 1975	2
	Funding	5
	Volunteer strength	5
	Legislation	6
	Scope of review	7
2	NEW PROGRAM TESTING AND DEVELOPMENT	8
	New programs tested and developed through fiscal year 1975	8
	Review of test and development	13
	Conclusions	14
	Agency comments and our evaluation	14
3	EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PART-TIME VOLUNTEERS	16
	Conclusion	17
4	COORDINATION OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS	18
	Efforts by ACTION headquarters to encourage coordination among volunteer programs	18
	Findings in the two regions	20
	Conclusions	23
	Agency comments	23
5	COMBINING FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC SERVICE	24
	Conclusion	25
	Agency comments	25
6	USE OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEERS OUTSIDE SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AREAS	26
	SBA/ACTION coordination at headquarters level	26
	Regional findings	27
	Conclusions	29
	Agency comments and our evaluation	30

CHAPTER		<u>Page</u>
7	VISTA VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT	31
	Overview	31
	Recruitment	32
	Training	33
	Placement	35
	Career development plan and in- service training for local volunteers	36
	ACTION's efforts to improve volunteer recruitment, training, and placement	37
	Conclusions	38

APPENDIX

I	Summary of ACTION comments on this re- port	39
II	Principal ACTION officials responsible for the administration of activities discussed in this report	45

ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	<i>ACTION:</i> Active Corps of Executives	<i>DLG 692</i>
ACVP	ACTION Cooperative Volunteer Program	<i>- AGC 1289</i>
FGP	Foster Grandparent Program	<i>- 1291</i>
GAO	General Accounting Office	
LRV	Locally Recruited Volunteer	
ORC	Office of Recruitment and Communications	
PLS	Program for Local Service	<i>- 1288</i>
RSVP	Retired Senior Volunteer Program	<i>- 1290</i>
SBA	Small Business Administration	<i>2</i>
SCORE	<i>ACTION:</i> Service Corps of Retired Executives	<i>623</i>
SCP	<i>ACTION:</i> Senior Companion Program	<i>696</i>
UYA	University Year for ACTION	<i>- AGC 1286</i>
VISTA	Volunteers in Service to America	

D I G E S T

ACTION was established in July 1971 to re-organize, under a single agency, all Federal volunteer programs previously scattered throughout the Government.

It was an essential step toward achieving fuller potentials of voluntary citizen services by meeting, through various Federal programs, the needs of people at home and abroad.

The following were combined under ACTION:

- Peace Corps.
- Volunteers in Service to America.
- National Student Volunteer Program.
- Foster Grandparent Program.
- Retired Senior Volunteer Program.
- Retired and Active Executives Corps.

ACTION was to focus its work in six areas:

- (1) Expanding the testing and development of proposed new volunteer programs—To date, 3 out of 16 programs tested have been adopted as operational. Almost half of ACTION's work, at about \$7.4 million, has been for testing a Program for Local Service. That test was begun in February 1973 and will end in late 1976. The program will not be continued, but its beneficial techniques will be applied in the Volunteers in Service to America program. /c

ACTION has adopted a management system to screen, evaluate, and follow the progress of such programs which, if put to

use effectively, should assure careful consideration of the merits of such programs for future operation. (See pp. 8 to 15.)

(2) Providing opportunities for more people to become part-time volunteers--(ACTION) has done this and has been particularly successful in expanding such programs with older volunteers. (See pp. 16 and 17.)

(3) Bringing together programs appealing to both younger and older Americans to use their diverse skills in joint efforts--  
In its early years of development ACTION did little to encourage coordination among the volunteer programs. In fiscal year 1974, however, the agency began prescribing policies and procedures to promote program coordination. It is still too early to assess the results of many of these changes. The agency is taking steps to find out if the new procedures are achieving their purpose. (See pp. 18 to 23.)

(4) Allowing interested Peace Corps volunteers to transfer to Volunteers in Service to America in order to use their skills and experience in helping the poor at home and vice versa-- When ACTION was established interested volunteers were encouraged to serve in both programs, but few did. ACTION placed little emphasis on the transfer program until fiscal year 1975 when it introduced new procedures. (See pp. 24 and 25.)

*PC + V.S.*

(5) Providing broader opportunities for business and professional volunteers, previously used mainly to serve clients of the Small Business Administration-- Although opportunities exist to use these volunteers more, ACTION did little to promote the idea. In July 1975 two business and professional volunteer programs were transferred back to the Small Business Administration by Executive order.

*professional  
jobs and*

During fiscal year 1976 ACTION plans to fund two small pilot projects for \$65,000 directed at providing volunteer business expertise to counsel people on fixed incomes and nonprofit organizations. Additional emphasis on test and development efforts may be necessary if ACTION is to make progress toward this goal. (See pp. 26 to 30.)

- (6) Recruiting, training, and placing full-time volunteers more effectively-~~GAO~~ found training and placement weaknesses in the Volunteers in Service to America program. ACTION has recently introduced new procedures which, if followed, should correct the weaknesses. (See pp. 31 to 38.)

ACTION concurred with these findings and described actions taken or planned to correct problems disclosed in this report. Appendix I contains a summary of ACTION's comments.

The report also contains information which should assist committees and Members of Congress with their legislative responsibilities relating to ACTION.

The Congress, in its annual review of ACTION's appropriation requests, should consider the agency's progress in developing new programs, particularly those which would use volunteers with professional and business experience in working on community problems.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The President established ACTION on July 1, 1971, under Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1971, to combine the following voluntary action programs:

- Peace Corps, formerly an independent agency under the jurisdiction of the Department of State.
- Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and National Student Volunteer programs, formerly under the Office of Economic Opportunity.
- Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), both formerly under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- Part of the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) and Active Corps of Executives (ACE) programs, formerly under the Small Business Administration (SBA).

As of June 30, 1975, ACTION was also responsible for the University Year for ACTION (UYA), Mini-Grant, and statewide programs which were begun as developmental programs but have become fully operational; the ACTION Cooperative Volunteer Program (ACVP), parts of which are considered operational; and the Senior Companion Program (SCP) which was authorized by the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

The President said, in proposing ACTION's establishment, that the foundation for a greatly expanded Government contribution to volunteer service existed and consolidation was needed in order to build on it.

The President said ACTION would

- expand testing and development of new volunteer programs,
- enable more people to become part-time volunteers,
- bring together programs appealing to both younger and older Americans to use their diverse skills on specific problems,
- allow interested volunteers who have served the needs of the poor abroad to turn their skills and experiences toward helping the poor at home and vice versa,

- use business and professional volunteers more extensively, and
- recruit, train, and place full-time volunteers more effectively.

## ORGANIZATION

ACTION has three administrative areas: Domestic Operations, International Operations, and support offices. Domestic Operations oversees all domestic programs and the 10 domestic regional offices. International Operations administers the Peace Corps. Support offices provide administrative assistance for both the Peace Corps and domestic programs, and includes the Office of Policy and Planning which tests and develops new programs, and the Office of Recruitment and Communications (ORC), which recruits both Peace Corps volunteers and VISTA.

## ACTION PROGRAMS AS OF JUNE 30, 1975

### Peace Corps

The Peace Corps sends volunteers overseas to help people in developing countries attain a higher level of social and economic progress. Volunteers offer skills in such fields as agriculture, mathematics, and business administration.

### Volunteers in Service to America

VISTA volunteers serve in communities throughout the country and live among the people they serve while helping local organizations fight poverty.

As of June 30, 1975, 4,131 VISTA volunteers were serving in 473 different projects designed to overcome such problems as inadequate health care, substandard education, and chronic unemployment.

### National Student Volunteer Program

These volunteers are college and high school students serving their communities. ACTION's sole input is providing technical assistance, training, and onsite consultation to participating schools. In fiscal year 1974 an estimated 425,000 college volunteers and 60,000 high school volunteers served at an estimated 1,900 colleges and 600 high schools. However, because these volunteers are not considered Action volunteers, we did not review the program.

### Foster Grandparent Program

Foster grandparents are low-income persons, 60 years old or more, who provide companionship and personal attention to emotionally, physically, and mentally handicapped children. Tasks include feeding, dressing, and helping them with speech and physical therapy.

Each foster grandparent is generally assigned two children, working 2 hours a day and 5 days a week with each child. They are paid \$1.60 an hour and are reimbursed for transportation costs.

### Retired Senior Volunteer Program

Retired senior volunteers are persons, 60 years old or more, who assist at such places as schools, libraries, and community service centers. They serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for certain out-of-pocket expenses.

### Service Corps of Retired Executives and Active Corps of Executives programs

The SCORE and ACE programs are comprised of business and professional persons providing counseling services to small businessmen and women in their communities and assisting persons interested in undertaking small business ventures. Program volunteers work directly with individuals or conduct group workshops on such subjects as bookkeeping, sales promotion, and public relations.

SCORE volunteers are retired persons and operate out of local chapters in cities nationwide. In the ACE program, which complements SCORE, businessmen and women counsel businesses on an "as needed" basis. Generally, ACE volunteers are not organized into chapters.

During our review, both programs operated mainly under the direction and policy guidance of SBA. ACTION's responsibilities included establishing new SCORE chapters, generating volunteer-recruiting publicity, and coordinating local SCORE programs with other ACTION volunteer work in the same communities. In July 1975 the programs were transferred back to SBA by Executive order.

### University Year for ACTION

The UYA program has two basic objectives: (1) to alleviate poverty by applying university resources to the problems of poor people and (2) to help universities

provide their students an experience-based curriculum. Students earn academic credit by working in poverty areas. ACTION provides technical assistance, overall direction, and funds for student allowances and program administrative costs. The university provides academic credit for the students' work, faculty supervision, equipment, and library facilities.

#### Mini-Grant program

Through the Mini-Grant program ACTION provides funds, ranging in size from \$500 to \$5,000 per grant, to local public and nonprofit organizations to mobilize part-time volunteers to work on antipoverty related projects. For every dollar requested over \$2,000, a matching local contribution is required. Also, grantees are required to have specific project goals achievable within definite time periods.

#### State Volunteer Services Coordinator Program

This program, through the creation of a voluntary action office within State government, establishes the capability to manage part-time volunteer programs intended to expand or improve the services provided by the jurisdiction. This program has been developed in conjunction with the National Governor's Conference.

#### ACTION Cooperative Volunteer Program

This program enables community groups to sponsor volunteers for such tasks as tutoring older students and developing new library services for the physically handicapped. The sponsoring agencies must pay ACTION about \$4,000 per volunteer man-year for various direct payments and benefits to the volunteers. ACTION recruits, places, and provides administrative support to the volunteers. ACTION plans to end this program in fiscal year 1977 and use this program's beneficial concepts in VISTA.

#### Senior Companion Program

SCP provides grants and technical assistance to set up local projects which use low-income persons, 60 years old or more, as senior companions who provide help to adults with special needs in health, education, welfare, and related settings.

## FUNDING

ACTION received \$142.3 million in fiscal year 1972, \$174.7 million in fiscal year 1973, \$171.0 million in fiscal year 1974, and \$177.7 million in fiscal year 1975. For fiscal year 1976, it is asking for \$182.4 million. The following table itemizes these amounts.

<u>Program</u>	<u>FY</u> <u>1972</u>	<u>FY</u> <u>1973</u>	<u>FY</u> <u>1974</u>	<u>FY</u> <u>1975</u>	<u>FY</u> <u>1976</u>
	(millions)				
Peace Corps	\$ 40.1	\$ 45.7	\$ 43.4	\$ 43.9	\$ 44.4
VISTA	22.9	25.1	22.0	22.8	22.3
Service learning (UYA and others)	4.5	9.0	7.4	7.1	7.2
Older American (FGP, RSVP, and others)	29.8	39.4	42.6	<u>c/46.8</u>	45.1
SCORE/ACE	(a)	(a)	.2	.4	<u>d/.4</u>
ACVP	.0	.1	.1	.4	.5
Other	.3	4.2	5.5	6.3	5.6
Program support (note b)	<u>44.7</u>	<u>51.2</u>	<u>49.8</u>	<u>53.0</u>	<u>56.9</u>
Total	<u>\$142.3</u>	<u>\$174.7</u>	<u>\$171.0</u>	<u>c/\$180.7</u>	<u>\$182.4</u>

a/Less than \$50,000.

b/Includes support for domestic and Peace Corps programs.

c/Includes \$3.0 million in carryover funds from the previous year.

d/Includes \$320,000 for SBA and \$80,000 for ACTION businessmen's programs under title III of Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

## VOLUNTEER STRENGTH

On July 1, 1971, there were 22,830 volunteers serving in the programs transferred to ACTION; by 1975 there were 182,469. The following table shows program growth.

<u>Volunteer</u>	<u>6/30/71</u>	<u>6/30/72</u>	<u>6/30/73</u>	<u>6/30/74</u>	<u>6/30/75</u>
Domestic:					
VISTA	4,206	3,626	4,336	4,327	4,131
SCP	0	0	0	0	1,028
FGP	4,221	4,737	9,873	12,193	13,627
RSVP	0	1,540	28,029	101,612	146,602
SCORE	4,005	4,173	4,639	4,694	5,198
ACE	<u>a/2,000</u>	2,461	2,783	2,364	2,492
UYA	0	920	1,411	1,867	1,228
ACVP	0	0	23	224	131
PLS	0	0	371	367	1,137
	14,432	17,457	51,465	127,648	175,574
Peace Corps	<u>8,398</u>	<u>6,894</u>	<u>7,354</u>	<u>8,044</u>	<u>6,895</u>
Total	<u>22,830</u>	<u>24,351</u>	<u>58,819</u>	<u>135,692</u>	<u>182,469</u>

a/Estimated.

The following table shows domestic volunteers working in ACTION's 10 regions on June 30, 1975.

<u>Re-</u> <u>gion</u>	<u>VISTA</u>	<u>SCP</u>	<u>FGP</u>	<u>RSVP</u>	<u>SCORE/</u> <u>ACE</u>	<u>UYA</u>	<u>ACVP</u>	<u>PLS</u>	<u>Total</u>
I	547	100	869	12,162	843	150	23	47	14,741
II	478	122	1,782	17,721	723	136	10	0	20,972
III	457	110	1,501	16,256	605	58	32	218	19,237
IV	473	145	1,913	21,342	1,218	107	15	0	25,213
V	439	199	2,689	27,678	1,054	109	13	54	32,235
VI	514	102	1,279	13,266	812	88	1	36	16,098
VII	208	65	915	9,359	545	83	7	61	11,243
VIII	291	40	563	8,664	526	109	10	64	10,267
IX	384	88	1,673	11,405	879	202	16	86	14,733
X	340	57	443	8,749	485	186	4	571	10,835
	<u>4,131</u>	<u>1,028</u>	<u>13,627</u>	<u>146,602</u>	<u>7,690</u>	<u>1,228</u>	<u>131</u>	<u>1,137</u>	<u>175,574</u>

### LEGISLATION

On October 1, 1973, the Domestic Volunteers Service Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-113) authorized ACTION to continue expanding its domestic volunteer programs and undertake special volunteer or demonstration programs to find new methods to encourage wider volunteer participation on a full-time, part-time, or short-term basis to meet a broad range of human, social, and environmental needs, particularly those related to poverty.

On July 12, 1974. Public Law 93-351 amended the Domestic Volunteer Service Act by revising the non-Federal funding formula for RSVP projects. Previously, each RSVP project was required to provide non-Federal funding to finance 10 percent of project costs the first year, 20 percent the second, 30 percent the third, 40 percent the fourth, 50 percent the fifth, and 100 percent thereafter. Under the new law, RSVP projects will not have to contribute more than 50 percent of project costs in any year.

The Older Americans Amendments of 1975 (Public Law 94-135) further amended the Domestic Volunteer Service Act by requiring ACTION to designate an Aging Resource Specialist for each State, taking out references to Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions as volunteers, and providing authorizations for FGP, SCP, and RSVP through fiscal year 1977.

#### SCOPE OF REVIEW

Our review was conducted at ACTION headquarters, its regional offices in Philadelphia (region III) and Dallas (region VI). Except for the VISTA/Peace Corps transfer program discussed in chapter 5, the review was confined to the domestic volunteer programs. We obtained information from responsible headquarters and regional officials while reviewing pertinent documents, records, and project files. We also obtained data from questionnaires sent to all project directors, SCORE chapter chairmen, and a representative number of VISTA and SCORE/ACE volunteers in the two regions.

The pursuit of the President's six goals is an executive decision and must be accomplished within the statutory authority of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended. While an agency may adopt general agency goals that are consistent with legislative authority, such goals may, from time to time, be modified through legislative action by the Congress. In November 1975 the Congress passed the Older Americans Amendments of 1975 which included required staffing patterns in ACTION field staff to enhance the National Older American Volunteer programs. Our review was limited to whether ACTION has successfully pursued the six goals originally set forth by the President in March 1971 and did not consider ACTION's effort to implement changes brought about by the Older Americans Amendments of 1975.

## CHAPTER 2

### NEW PROGRAM TESTING AND DEVELOPMENT

The President said ACTION would expand the testing and development of new volunteer programs. He cited health services, housing, the environment, educational development, manpower, and community planning as some areas to be addressed by the agency.

Since July 1971 ACTION has subjected 16 new programs to testing and development. Three of these are operational and seven others have been terminated. Almost half of ACTION's test and development costs during this period have been for one program which was begun in February 1973 and will end late in 1976. The program will not be continued as an operating program as planned but techniques developed will be applied in VISTA.

In its early years ACTION had no written procedures on how to select, develop, test, and evaluate new programs or judge their worthiness for expansion to fully operational status on a national scale. We were told that procedures varied for each program. In the past year ACTION has relied on informal procedures for selecting, developing, testing, evaluating, or judging new programs' worthiness for expansion to fully operational status on a national scale.

#### NEW PROGRAMS TESTED AND DEVELOPED THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 1975

Through fiscal year 1975 ACTION had spent about \$16.7 million in testing and developing the following programs:

<u>Programs</u>	<u>Cost (millions)</u>
Program for Local Service (PLS)	\$ 7.4
UYA	4.3
Volunteer Mobilization Programs	3.8
Volunteers in Justice	0.8
Youth Challenge Program	<u>0.4</u>
Total	<u>\$16.7</u>

Other programs had been tested at less agency cost. We reviewed the PLS and UYA programs--ACTION's two largest efforts--to assess test and development procedures and progress of the programs.

## Program for Local Service

PLS is ACTION's largest test and development effort. Under PLS, volunteers 17 years old or more, serve a full-time year working in local communities and receive \$100 every 2 weeks and a \$300 termination allowance upon completing service. Local sponsors recruit the volunteers, process their applications, and in some instances, contribute up to \$500 to their support. ACTION supports the community grantee efforts to solicit potential sponsors, monitor grant administration, and share the balance of volunteer support cost.

Initially, project costs are shared between the Federal Government (up to 90 percent) and the community grantee sponsoring the project. Communities receive their share of PLS support from public moneys, available through general revenue sharing or from funds earmarked for manpower, education, or other social programs or private contributions. Originally, ACTION anticipated that local sponsors would assume responsibility for programs during their second and succeeding years of operation.

In 1972 ACTION hired a consultant to study the potential supply and demand of volunteers for a new volunteer program which ultimately became PLS. The study showed that there were many potential volunteers.

The consultant also interviewed potential sponsors for the new program. Thirty-four percent of these organizations indicated that they expected problems with the introduction of a new volunteer program. The major problem cited was providing adequate supervision for the volunteers. Other problems include:

- Providing administrative and supervisory support may cause budgetary increases which will be a problem.
- Concern over loss of funding from their private sources once the Federal Government has entered this field.
- Difficulty of recruiting the disadvantaged and minority groups.
- Concern over the potential for duplicating services provided by other organizations.

PLS efforts began when ACTION awarded its first grant of nearly \$1.1 million in March 1973 to Washington State to operate a project with 350 volunteers between 18 and 25 years

ola. During fiscal year 1974 ACTION funded seven new PLS projects at a cost of \$1.2 million and awarded Washington State a second grant of \$1.1 million to add over 500 PLS volunteers serving statewide rather than just in one county. The fiscal year 1974 grants broadened the PLS concept by including older volunteers and more diverse volunteer assignments. However, volunteer levels were scaled down to between 50 and 85 individuals for each project except Washington.

In fiscal year 1975 ACTION continued funding six of the projects initiated in the prior fiscal year but discontinued funding Washington State and one other project. Eleven new projects were added to the program, bringing the total number of PLS projects in fiscal year 1975 to 17 and Federal funding to \$4.0 million.

ACTION's fiscal year 1976 budget request included \$1 million to enroll 300 volunteers in the PLS program. ACTION indicated that 4 years of PLS testing was necessary to make a determination and create a model for developing a major operating program. Through congressional budget action, this amount was adjusted to \$827,000.

In its January 1976 budget submission for fiscal year 1977, ACTION plans to end the PLS effort after 4 years of experimentation and to use the improved techniques developed in the VISTA program. ACTION believes that the VISTA program will be given more flexibility in meeting community needs.

Major VISTA program emphasis in fiscal year 1977 will continue to be on providing direct Federal support for volunteers. Funding is proposed under the VISTA program for continuing some successful PLS projects into fiscal year 1977 with an estimated 367 volunteers. All other PLS projects will be gradually phased out. The fiscal year 1977 budget provides for an overall reduction of volunteers in the VISTA program.

#### Washington State project

In 1973 ACTION employed a second consulting firm to follow the progress of the Washington State PLS project and to report on its effectiveness. In October 1973, after the project had been operating for about 6 months, the consultant provided ACTION with preliminary research findings indicating that the project was working effectively as a demonstration effort with predetermined objectives and that volunteers in

the program could be supported at less cost than volunteers in the VISTA program. At the time, limited information was available on volunteer turnover and attrition.

The consultant prepared two final reports in February 1975 covering its assessment of the effectiveness and cost/benefits of the Washington project.

The consultant's reports concluded that:

- Volunteer efforts had been cost beneficial.
- One-third of the volunteers enrolled in the program during its first year of operation had left before completing a full year of service.
- Volunteers pay may not have been sufficient to meet minimum subsistence levels.
- The desired level of volunteers and sponsors was achieved and the matching process was generally effective but techniques used for obtaining applicants did not produce the maximum possible response.
- Sponsor orientation was a weak link in the PLS process with limited sponsor participation.
- Preservice training of volunteers generally did not meet program requirements.

The consultant's reports covered data obtained from the volunteers and sponsors admitted into the original King County, Washington, program before June 1974. The State expanded the program outside King County to other areas in the State while the consultant's study was in progress, and the number of volunteers and sponsors increased in the program during fiscal year 1975 to 740 and 370, respectively.

Federal funding ended with a grant in fiscal year 1974 that carried the State through December 1975. The State PLS office project director said that the State legislature had not appropriated funds to replace the fiscal year 1974 \$1.1 million Federal support for the Washington program but had provided State funding of \$1 million, about \$100,000 more than in the preceding year. Therefore, the programs had to be scaled down between August and December 1975. As a result, the level of volunteers went down from 740 to about 263 and sponsors were reduced from about 370 to about 230. The director also said that the program was experiencing a 38 percent attrition rate and so, very few volunteers needed to be terminated involuntarily.

The State project director said that the State had generally supported volunteer programs such as PLS. He indicated that current plans are to go to the State legislature for additional funding in early 1977 to obtain sufficient funding to expand the level of volunteers to earlier program levels.

#### Other PLS projects

In fiscal years 1974 and 1975 ACTION added 18 new PLS projects at various cities and communities nationwide. ACTION hired a third consultant to perform an evaluation of eight of the new projects. The consultant was to assist regional offices and local sponsors in determining the degree to which PLS projects have accomplished their stated objectives.

In its baseline report submitted to ACTION in January 1975, the consultant questioned the amount of turnover occurring after volunteers were placed with sponsors. The consultant stated that the dynamics of ongoing placements and postplacement turnover have produced a serious dilemma for project directors in attaining (1) the planned level of volunteers and (2) a full year's service from volunteers placed.

In May 1975 the consultant submitted a supplement to its January report indicating that several projects were still experiencing volunteer losses. The report indicated that terminations ranged from immediately following placement through March 1975 with no indication that the rate of terminations was declining. It was further noted that several sites were below their budgeted volunteer man-year allocation and that the number of volunteers who completed the year would probably be considerably smaller than the original projection. The consultant recommended that ACTION follow up on this since participation continuity is a vital element of program success.

At the end of August 1975 the consultant gave ACTION the preliminary results of its final report showing that terminations were continuing. The consultant did not provide data on the other four projects, one of which had been terminated earlier. ACTION officials said that they have been closely monitoring the attrition rate and that the consultant's final report should be available in early 1976.

#### UYA program

In September 1971 ACTION began testing and developing the UYA program. ACTION awarded 39 grants totaling

\$2.5 million and paid volunteer stipends and expenses amounting to \$1.8 million while the program was being tested and developed.

We found no evidence of formal program evaluations during this phase and only limited evidence of ACTION's monitoring activities of the schools involved. However, a UYA official said the agency worked very closely with the schools and made periodic progress-monitoring visits.

On July 1, 1972, UYA was transferred to operational status; that is, it was made an official national program, thereby gaining equal status with other ACTION domestic programs. Among the reasons cited for this decision were:

- The likelihood that the Congress would specifically authorize the program (which it did with the enactment of Public Law 92-424, dated September 19, 1972).
- Congressional interest, as evidenced by a series of questions on UYA by the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare in March 1972.
- Acceptance of the program by the academic community.

#### REVIEW OF TEST AND DEVELOPMENT

In its early years ACTION did not employ formal procedures for evaluating test and development projects but tailored its evaluation methods to individual project requirements. However, in November 1973 ACTION established a Program Development Review Board to review all new program proposals. Board membership was to include various ACTION headquarters officials and a regional director to obtain agency-wide program development input.

In its reviews, the board had to consider to what degree proposed programs would help achieve ACTION goals, use its resources, and achieve desired program results. When a program was approved, the board had to recommend, in general terms, the location(s) where it was to be tested, its size, and its priority relative to other developmental programs. The board was convened only once, for a 2-day period in November 1973, to review 56 new program proposals. In recommending 20 of these for testing and development, either as separate programs or as ideas to be tested in conjunction with other programs, the board considered these criteria. According to ACTION headquarters officials, the status of the review board became uncertain in July 1974.

In October 1975 ACTION's Director informed us that informal procedures were in use in which the following steps were being taken by the Office of Policy and Planning in reaching decisions on new program test and development.

- Before the new program enters test and development, it determines whether it is consistent with ACTION's goals, and if the results of prior demonstration projects have been incorporated.
- It identifies appropriate milestones for the program and assures that they are incorporated into ACTION's operating plan and that the program's status is reported and analyzed quarterly.
- It insures that adequate funds are available for the program.
- It develops recommendations for the Director's (or Deputy Director's) approval as to whether the program merits promotion to operational status.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Although ACTION expanded volunteerism into new and broader areas by testing and developing new programs as called for in the President's reorganization plan, few of these programs reached operational status. Also, there were no written procedures whereby ACTION could carry out this responsibility in a logical manner. In the past, procedures varied with each new program.

ACTION needed to establish a management system for screening proposed new programs and for periodically evaluating them as they are tested and developed. While ACTION attempted to do this when it established the Program Development Review Board, it did not, in our opinion, achieve the desired results.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

ACTION stated that the Program Development Review Board was established when the agency had little experience in completing assessments of the new programs and had on hand a large number of developmental programs being proposed for testing. It added, however, that the formal procedures required to be carried out by the board are no longer necessary because the backlog of proposed new programs has been eliminated. Thorough reviews of such programs are performed by ACTION, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Congress

through the annual appropriations process, and experience gained since 1973 allows for less formal and more expeditious procedures to be used.

ACTION also indicated that, during its first years, it sponsored many pilot projects with different models employed for each. It said procedures varied with each program, indicating that when the agency was established, it had no existing models for programs which would concentrate on educational development, manpower, training, community planning, and other areas to which the President had directed attention.

ACTION stated that the new informal procedures are being used in approving new programs which provide the agency with adequate screening before determining if they should be promoted to operational status. It assured us that the new procedures will be incorporated in a formal ACTION order to assure adherence and the results documented.

We believe that the informal procedures, if put to proper use, should provide the agency with an adequate means for reviewing the new programs it will accept for test and development and should assure careful consideration of the merits of such programs for future operation.

### CHAPTER 3

#### EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR

#### PART-TIME VOLUNTEERS

The President said ACTION would provide more part-time volunteers. During the reorganization hearings, programs using part-time volunteers were identified as FGP, RSVP, and SCORE/ACE. These programs are comprised principally of older volunteers.

Between July 1, 1971, and June 30, 1975, ACTION provided more part-time volunteer service opportunities by increasing activities in all the programs. During this period the number of FGP projects 1/ increased from 67 to 157, RSVP projects from 11 to 663, and SCORE chapters from 168 to 265. For the same period the ACTION part-time volunteer total grew considerably, as shown in the following table.

	<u>Volunteers</u>	
	<u>7/1/71</u>	<u>6/30/75</u>
FGP	4,221	13,627
RSVP	0	146,602
SCORE/ACE	<u>a/6,005</u>	<u>7,690</u>
Total	<u>10,226</u>	<u>167,919</u>

a/Estimated.

ACTION has provided opportunities for more people to become part-time volunteers. However, we found some RSVP volunteers reported in ACTION statistics had already been serving at the same stations before becoming part of RSVP. Forty-two project directors in regions III and VI said that 631 (15 percent) of their 4,204 active volunteers on June 30, 1973, had been serving in identical capacities before their projects became part of RSVP.

Thus, at least in these two regions, RSVP volunteer statistics cannot accurately reflect the number of part-time volunteers recruited by ACTION's efforts to meet the President's goal.

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1/In this report, the term "project" means local community organizations to which VISTA, FGP, and RSVP volunteers are assigned.

## CONCLUSION

ACTION has met the goal of expanding opportunities for part-time volunteers by increasing the number of FGP and RSVP projects and SCORE chapters. As a result, ACTION's first 4 years of operation has considerably increased part-time volunteer totals.

## CHAPTER 4

### COORDINATION OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

The President stated that ACTION would bring together, in one place, programs appealing predominantly to younger Americans (Peace Corps and VISTA) with those appealing to older Americans (FGP, RSVP, and SCORE/ACE) to use their skills on specific problems.

Before fiscal year 1974 ACTION did little to encourage coordination among the volunteer programs, and no formal headquarters' policies were established.

In the two regional offices, we found no written procedures or guidelines relating to program coordination and no evidence of any VISTA, UYA, FGP, and RSVP volunteers joining forces to work on any specific community problems, even though such opportunities apparently exist. The agency began taking positive steps in fiscal year 1974 to establish formal policies and procedures to promote coordination. Procedures are being planned by ACTION to assess the effectiveness of procedures it has implemented for coordination.

#### EFFORTS BY ACTION HEADQUARTERS TO ENCOURAGE COORDINATION AMONG VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Before fiscal year 1974 ACTION headquarters did little to encourage coordination among the volunteer programs in addressing community problems. We did find, however, that VISTA, UYA, and SCORE volunteers worked together in emergency situations such as the 1972 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Rapid City, South Dakota, floods. Also, in October 1972 ACTION began publishing a newspaper for its volunteers in an attempt to "narrow the gap" between them.

In fiscal year 1974 ACTION headquarters encouraged closer coordination among its programs by sponsoring a series of ACTION institutes for headquarters and regional staffs, introducing an in-house training program, and redesigning and expanding the agency newspaper. In fiscal year 1975 it introduced its Integrated Programming and Training System prescribing ACTION policies and procedures regarding volunteer program coordination.

#### ACTION institutes

A new Director of ACTION took office in April 1973. In July 1973 the Director notified all agency employees that he found an attitude of "programmatically segregation" prevalent among ACTION staff and that he wanted immediate steps taken

to change it. He added that all ACTION program people must be mentally flexible enough to pull from an agency-wide array of programs that combination of programs needed to combat the specific social problem facing a community, and that starting in late July a series of "programmatic institutes" would be held for headquarters and regional personnel.

One of the major thrusts of the institutes was to make the participants aware of the agency's overall goals and the important parts their respective programs were to play in attaining them. Between July and September 1973, five 1-week institutes were conducted. An average of 70 persons attended each institute.

One of the issues addressed was the need for using several ACTION programs in a coordinated approach to community problems. For example, those attending were informed that a UYA project in region VI could use volunteers from the VISTA, RSVP, and SCORE/ACE programs in attacking educational problems of the underprivileged.

#### In-house training

Before fiscal year 1974 most VISTA volunteers and supervisors were trained by private firms under contract to ACTION. As the VISTA training contracts expired, ACTION's regional offices assumed the responsibility. FGP and RSVP project staffs have always been trained by ACTION staff.

In the past, each volunteer program had its own independently developed training goals and objectives, content, and materials. ACTION procedures now provide that project directors and supervisors from the various programs will be trained together whenever common needs exist to (1) help assure that the total ACTION community is working toward the same goals and (2) encourage communication across component program lines. Also, the procedures call for common course content to the maximum extent possible. Through February 1975, 794 project directors, chapter chairmen, and supervisors from the various programs were trained under the new system in the two regions included in our review. Also, during the same period the two regions provided pre-service or inservice training to 1,738 VISTA and 15 UYA volunteers.

#### New ACTION publication

Effective November 1973 ACTION redesigned and expanded its monthly agency-wide newspaper to include more coverage of the volunteer programs. It is distributed to an estimated 179,000 volunteers, volunteer supervisors, and local

project directors, as well as ACTION staff and other interested persons.

The newspaper contains articles on ACTION staff and volunteer activity, technical assistance for the volunteers, correspondence from volunteers, and on occasion, stories on how its programs are working together. In the first 8 issues following the format changes, 14 volunteers requested advice from other volunteers to solve community problems. For example:

- A VISTA volunteer assigned to a center developing recreational facilities asked for suggestions on fashioning playground material from scrap.
- A UYA volunteer working with a nonprofit group sought financing advice for construction of a day-care center.

#### Integrated Programming and Training System

In November 1974 ACTION installed an Integrated Programming and Training System which, among other things, calls for improved communication among the various volunteer programs and the integration of the programs at the community level. In this regard, the new system states:

"Programs within a community will be integrated by identifying sponsors who will utilize several types of ACTION volunteers on a single project to accomplish a broad range of programming objectives. Similarly, ACTION and local sponsoring agencies can achieve a significant impact in the community by programming the activities of various types of ACTION volunteers assigned to the different sponsors, towards the solution of a single problem."

Potential sponsors of ACTION programs are encouraged to consider the feasibility of implementing these concepts to meet the needs of their communities. However, the new system does not include procedures for assessing the extent to which program coordination is being achieved in the local communities.

#### FINDINGS IN THE TWO REGIONS

We found no written procedures or guidelines in the two regions relating to coordination among the volunteer

programs. In one region the acting regional director said that his region did not have the staff capability or manpower to prepare and issue such procedures and guidelines. The regional director of the other region stated that both staffing problems and administrative inadequacies in supporting the various projects have contributed to the lack of program coordination. Also, local project directors and VISTA volunteers in both regions indicated in our questionnaires that there had been little meaningful coordination among the programs.

As of June 30, 1973, 35 communities in the two regions had at least two different ACTION projects with 17 of them having three or more. As shown in the following table, about 68 percent of the regions' VISTA, UYA, FGP, and RSVP volunteers were located in these 35 communities.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Total regional volunteers</u>	<u>Volunteers serving in 35 communities</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
VISTA	801	467	58
UYA	243	176	72
FGP	2,071	1,694	82
RSVP	<u>5,206</u>	<u>3,292</u>	63
Total	<u>8,321</u>	<u>5,629</u>	68

#### Review of project files

We reviewed 28 projects' files in these communities and found no evidence that volunteers from one type of project were working on specific problems with volunteers from another type. However, we did find evidence of some cooperation, such as a VISTA project helping recruit volunteers for an RSVP project and an FGP project referring ineligible applicants to a local RSVP project.

#### Replies to our questionnaires

We sent questionnaires to 107 VISTA, UYA, FGP, and RSVP project directors and 123 active VISTA volunteers, all of whom were located in the 35 communities previously discussed.

Only 66 replies were received from the project directors. They showed that:

--Forty-four maintained contact with other ACTION programs.

--Twenty-seven maintained a record of skills possessed by their volunteers.

--Thirty-four were encouraged by ACTION to contact other ACTION programs.

--Thirteen had requested assistance from other ACTION programs.

--Nine had participated in activities of other ACTION programs.

Some of these replies showed that the indicated coordination was not too meaningful. For example, an RSVP director indicated that over 40 RSVP volunteers had participated with an FGP project for "orientation and social gathering." Also, a VISTA project director indicated that 12 volunteers attended a picnic and seminar with UYA volunteers. Neither director indicated that any services had been rendered.

Only 52 replies were received from the VISTA volunteers. They showed that:

--Forty-five volunteers had never requested assistance from other ACTION programs. Of the other seven, six stated that they requested and received assistance and one did not reply to the question.

--Forty-four volunteers were never asked to provide assistance to other ACTION programs. Of the other eight, two either did not reply or were nonresponsive to the question, and six indicated that they were asked to, and did, provide such assistance. However, none of these six volunteers gave a clear explanation of the circumstances involved for us to determine if such assistance was meaningful.

--None of the 52 volunteers were aware of any instances in which assistance had been offered but rejected.

In addition, 21 of the 52 volunteers replied that they were aware of instances in which coordination among volunteers from other ACTION programs would be beneficial, such as:

1. "Economic expertise in mortgages from SCORE/ACE." This comment was made by a volunteer whose primary duties were in a housing project.

2. "Specific professional expertise in areas such as law, financial management." This comment was made by a volunteer who served as a business manager for a local health and medical center.
3. "Technical assistance in housing, education, etc. from SCORE, RSVP." This comment was made by a volunteer working on housing concerns.

#### CONCLUSIONS

ACTION did little to encourage coordination among the volunteer programs until fiscal year 1974. Although the agency has since prescribed policies and procedures to promote program coordination and is encouraging coordination through its media and training courses, it still needs to establish formal procedures for assessing the extent to which the procedures are achieving their intended effect at the local level.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS

ACTION stated that it will take steps, through the agency's Management Information System reports and other means, to assure program coordination at the local level.

## CHAPTER 5

### COMBINING FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC SERVICE

The President said there would be great value in permitting volunteers who had served the needs of the poor abroad to turn their skills and experience toward helping the poor at home and vice versa. We confined our review in this area to transfers made by Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers to each other's program because, at the time of re-organization, they were the only full-time volunteers working either abroad or at home on the problems of the poor.

We found that:

- Between fiscal years 1965 and 1971 inclusive, a 7-year span, 585 volunteers had transferred between the two programs.
- In fiscal year 1972 ACTION had established a program offering volunteers the opportunity to transfer to the other volunteer service after successfully completing their initial tours.
- Between July 1971 and April 1974, approximately a 3-year span, 258 volunteers had transferred between the two volunteer programs.
- A small percentage of volunteers had chosen to participate in the transfer program.

A chronology of events since the program's establishment follows.

ACTION's records were incomplete regarding the program's effectiveness in fiscal year 1972. An ACTION official said that during that year, mailings were sent to about 470 VISTA volunteers having certain skills and to all Peace Corps volunteers advising them of the program. He also mentioned articles publicizing the program had been sent to the volunteers.

We found no evidence that ACTION put any emphasis on the program since fiscal year 1972. An ACTION department head, to whom we were referred for information, said she had no idea how volunteers learn that the program exists.

We reviewed issues of the agency newspaper from January 1972 to April 1975 and found nothing advising volunteers of the program. However, four articles featured volunteers who had served in both volunteer services.

During fiscal years 1972, 1973, and through April 1974, 63, 101, and 94 volunteers, respectively, participated in the program. The total number of volunteers who served in the Peace Corps and VISTA programs during that period is not readily available. However, combined totals of Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers on June 30, 1972, 1973, 1974, and 1975 were about 10,500, 11,700, 12,300, and 11,000, respectively.

#### CONCLUSION

Before ACTION was established, relatively few volunteers served in both the Peace Corps and VISTA programs. When ACTION was initially established, interested volunteers were encouraged to serve in both programs, but few did. During the intervening years, ACTION placed little emphasis on the program.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS

ACTION stated that the agency has recently taken steps to improve its performance in this area. Since June 1975 all Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers have been provided with an inquiry form approximately 3 months before completion of their tours. This is to be returned to ACTION headquarters by volunteers interested in receiving career planning information, extending their present assignments, or transferring to the other full-time programs.

ACTION said that though this new procedure has not been in effect long enough to determine the results, approximately 60 terminating VISTA volunteers had requested information about joining the Peace Corps since it had been implemented. It added that the agency would give this area further attention to see if it can increase the present low rate of dual volunteer service.

## CHAPTER 6

### USE OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEERS

#### OUTSIDE SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AREAS

The President said ACTION would permit more extensive use of business and professional volunteers. He believed valuable volunteer professional skills were being limited by narrow categorical programs when their broader application was urgently needed. As an example, he cited the SCORE/ACE programs because the services then provided by them came only through the SBA.

At the Senate hearings on the President's proposal, SBA's Administrator testified that, while SBA would continue to work with SCORE/ACE, ACTION would increase existing opportunities for SCORE/ACE volunteers to participate in other volunteer activities. We limited our review to determining whether (1) ACTION was providing new opportunities for SCORE/ACE volunteers and (2) the extent to which these volunteers were being used to assist other ACTION volunteer programs.

We found ACTION headquarters had not instituted any written policy and had made only minimal use of these volunteers outside SBA areas.

In July 1975 the President transferred SCORE/ACE, ACTION's operating programs in the goal area, back to SBA. However, ACTION still has legislative responsibility for developing programs which utilize business and professional volunteers in addressing community problems.

Based on its appropriation request, ACTION expects to receive about \$65,000 in fiscal year 1976 to use for testing and developing volunteer programs using volunteers from the business and professional sectors to provide counseling services to persons on fixed incomes and nonprofit organizations. A third developmental program directed toward providing business advice to local governments is also planned to start as soon as funds become available.

#### SBA/ACTION COORDINATION AT HEADQUARTERS LEVEL

An ACTION official said it was a year after ACTION had been established before ACTION's SCORE/ACE office began to function fully. He attributed at least part of the delay to initial reorganization resistance by certain SBA employees and SCORE volunteers.

In January 1973 the two agencies issued a joint memorandum formally defining, for the first time, their SCORE/ACE responsibilities. ACTION was to encourage formation of new SCORE chapters, generate recruiting publicity for SCORE/ACE volunteers, coordinate local SCORE/ACE activities with other community volunteer programs, and direct that part of SCORE/ACE programs concerned with new opportunities for volunteers. SBA kept responsibility for overall program direction, operation, and oversight. In March 1973 SBA instructed its field offices to implement the agreement. ACTION did not issue similar instructions to its regional offices until October 1974.

In fiscal years 1972, 1973, and 1974, SCORE/ACE volunteers provided professional assistance to over 112,000 active or potential small entrepreneurs. ACTION headquarters said no records were available to show how many volunteers helped outside SBA areas. ACTION's regional officials believe many opportunities exist for such use of volunteers.

#### REGIONAL FINDINGS

ACTION's SCORE/ACE coordinators in the two regions said SCORE/ACE volunteers had been used only minimally outside SBA areas. The region III coordinator attributed this underuse to the agency's inadequate efforts to promote broader use of these volunteers. He said local volunteer projects needed more coordination to reach the President's goal. In neither region did we find any evidence in project files that SCORE/ACE volunteers had been used by other volunteer programs.

#### Replies to our questionnaires

We sent questionnaires to all 52 SCORE chapter chairmen in the 2 regions and received 26 replies (50 percent). Twenty-one chairmen stated they maintained no contact with other ACTION programs in their communities and ACTION had never encouraged such contacts. Twenty-two chairmen indicated their volunteers had not assisted other ACTION programs.

In region III, three of seven chapter chairmen offered unsolicited comments indicating their willingness to work with ACTION, while the other four chairmen offered no comment. In region VI, 9 of 19 chairmen said they did not want to be associated with ACTION. For example, one chairman replied:

"\* \* \* Both SBA and SCORE are vitally interested in the economic welfare of the small business man or woman; ACTION is a third party in all this, with many other interests. We have no quarrel with their broad interest in other humanitarian activities, but cannot see how they are directly or indirectly beneficial to the interest which we have in common with SBA. \* \* \*"

We sent questionnaires to 188 SCORE/ACE volunteers in the regions. We received 89 replies (47 percent) which showed:

- 85 had never contacted other ACTION programs.
- 57 had never been encouraged to contact other ACTION programs.
- 86 had never assisted another ACTION program.
- 79 would be willing to assist other ACTION programs.

Regions' efforts to broaden  
SCORE/ACE volunteer usage

In June 1973 the region III SCORE/ACE coordinator proposed guidelines and procedures to the deputy regional director recommending that region III officials

- discuss project problems where SCORE might help with the SCORE chapter chairmen in the area or with the SCORE coordinator if needed counseling talent was unavailable in that area;
- encourage VISTA volunteers to develop SCORE cases and introduce SCORE volunteers to potential or existing small businessmen in poverty communities; and
- urge closer cooperation among VISTA, RSVP, and SCORE/ACE programs, especially in recruiting new volunteers and cases.

In September 1973 the regional director provided his State program directors with a listing of SCORE chapter chairmen, showing their locations and phone numbers, and advised them to discuss with SCORE chapter chairmen any problems being experienced by VISTA, UYA, FGP, and RSVP projects where use of SCORE volunteers might help. In March 1974 the State program directors told us only 5 of 24 SCORE chapters (21 percent) had been contacted.

In a December 10, 1973, memorandum, the region VI SCORE/ACE coordinator urged the regional director to inform ACTION headquarters of what he termed "the smothering effects" of SBA on SCORE/ACE programs. He elaborated:

"The problem is that when we organize a chapter and SBA trains the volunteers and administers the program, the volunteers assume a rigid commitment to the narrow horizons of SBA. If we intend to lead SCORE/ACE from this limited existence into broader volunteer efforts, volunteer perspectives will have to be changed. We have the legislative mandate to make this change."

On December 19, 1973, the region VI director requested ACTION headquarters' approval to use \$10,575 of available VISTA funds to hire a supervisor for two SCORE/ACE program innovations which would involve VISTA and, possibly, RSVP volunteers. In his opinion, such a supervisor would multiply SCORE/ACE effectiveness and help "blaze the trail" to new SCORE/ACE successes. An ACTION headquarters official said no documentation of this request existed. He recalled the proposed action was never taken for a number of reasons:

- It would have been inappropriate to use VISTA funds on a SCORE/ACE matter.
- Coordination with SBA would have been necessary.
- The request had been superseded by a subsequent region VI proposal.

On July 18, 1975, President Ford issued Executive Order 11871 which transferred the SCORE/ACE programs back to SBA. However, ACTION still has responsibility under title III of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 for developing programs which use the volunteer efforts of persons with business expertise to focus on community and social problems.

### CONCLUSIONS

One of the reasons SCORE/ACE programs were brought under ACTION was to provide their volunteers with opportunities to serve clients other than just those provided through SBA. We found a need for such services in the two regions.

We found instances where ACTION regional officials were attempting to expand usage of SCORE/ACE volunteers with little success, even though most volunteers contacted were amenable to such efforts. We believe ACTION's lack of

success in this area is attributable to its failure to establish an agency-wide policy encouraging this expanded role and a management system to accomplish it.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

In commenting on our draft report, ACTION did not dispute our findings concerning not using SCORE/ACE volunteers in other ACTION programs as of early 1974. However, it stated that through the new integrated system implemented in November 1974 (see p. 20) and the agency's policy of integrated programming, much progress had been achieved in using SCORE/ACE volunteers on non-SBA assignments by the end of fiscal year 1975. The agency also said SBA statistics showed that more than half of the SCORE/ACE workload during fiscal year 1975 was devoted to serving non-SBA clients.

We did not assess the validity of the SBA statistics cited by the agency. However, our review at ACTION headquarters revealed no evidence of efforts to promote the use of SCORE/ACE activities in non-SBA matters.

ACTION stated that under the authority of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, it planned to undertake three pilot programs directed toward providing business advice to local governments, business counseling to nonprofit organizations, and counseling services for persons on fixed incomes. The agency also indicated that in the design of these programs, ACTION would keep in mind our findings disclosed in this report insofar as they are applicable to the new situation.

ACTION said that it plans to use \$65,000 in fiscal year 1976 funds to test and develop programs to provide counseling services to persons on fixed incomes and nonprofit organizations. Another developmental program directed toward providing business advice to local governments is also planned to get underway as soon as funds become available. In our view, additional emphasis on test and development efforts may be necessary if ACTION is to make any meaningful progress toward this goal.

## CHAPTER 7

### VISTA VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT

The President said ACTION would recruit, train, and place full-time volunteers more effectively. Because our review was concerned primarily with ACTION's domestic volunteer programs, we limited our coverage in this area to the VISTA program; the only domestic program for which ACTION recruits, trains, and places volunteers.

We found that:

- Many potential volunteers had not been reporting for training because they were not given enough information about what projects they would be assigned to after completing their training.
- Many VISTA volunteers felt the training inadequately prepared them for duties they were to perform.
- Actual project needs had not always been relayed to ACTION recruiters.
- Mismatches in volunteer placements had occurred.
- ACTION had failed to insure low income VISTA volunteers received required career training.

#### OVERVIEW

There are two classifications of VISTA volunteers: nationally recruited volunteers and locally recruited volunteers. Their characteristics follow:

<u>Nationally recruited volunteers</u>	<u>Locally recruited volunteers</u>
1. Are not recruited by ACTION for a specific project; rather they can be assigned to projects anywhere.	1. Are recruited by the local community organization for specific jobs with that organization.
2. Generally have college backgrounds or particular job skills.	2. Have usually lived in their communities for years and been involved in various poverty programs on part-time bases.

We restricted our review, for the most part, to nationally recruited volunteers because ACTION staff recruits, trains, and places them. However, ACTION also trains locally recruited volunteers (LRVs), so we included local volunteers in our review of training.

## RECRUITMENT

At the time of our review, ORC, in Washington, had established recruiting goals for its four regional recruiting offices. Each office in turn had relayed these goals (by specific skills needed) to its area recruiting offices, which were responsible for recruiting a predetermined number of volunteers to meet these needs, regardless of the regions in which they were needed.

After completing a VISTA application, each potential volunteer was interviewed by a regional recruiter who forwarded the information to ORC. ORC screened each application, record of interview, if any, and replies from personal references before determining the most suitable skill area for each applicant. An ORC official said this process took at least 2 months.

ORC matched applicants against requests for volunteers from the agency's 10 regional offices and invited applicants to training in one of them. ORC gave regional offices information about applicants to be trained in their regions, including their skills and projects to which ORC had preassigned them. Applicants were not notified of preassignments because final placement was to be made during training.

A large percentage of the invited applicants were not reporting for training. For example, of 375 applicants invited to training in the two regions for the October 1973 training cycle, only 130 (35 percent) reported.

ACTION conducted a survey in April 1974 to determine why so many VISTA applicants were not reporting for training. The primary reasons given by the applicants were (1) decisions had to be made on accepting education or career alternatives before invitations to training were received, (2) the program offered no financial security, and (3) enough information had not been given about what projects they would be assigned to after completing training. ACTION stated in the survey report that it had little control over the first negative reason given by applicants because timeliness of invitations depends primarily upon when applications are received by ACTION. As for the applicants' second demurrer, the law restricts the stipend to be paid but leaves

to the discretion of the Director the amounts of living and support allowances to be provided the volunteers. Concerning the applicants' third objection, ACTION has recently changed its procedures to remedy the problem. (See p. 37.)

### Regional findings

As mentioned above, ORC's regional and area recruiting offices were responsible for recruiting VISTA volunteers. To support this function, the 10 regional offices were to tell ORC how many volunteers local projects had requested.

ACTION procedures called for the local projects to submit their requests for volunteers with specific skills to the regional offices where they would be consolidated before being forwarded to ORC. However, for each training cycle, the Office of Domestic and Anti-Poverty Operations would limit the number of training slots requested by each region. For example, region VI's request for 120 volunteers, pursuant to instructions for the summer 1973 training cycle, was far short of the 400 volunteers requested by local projects in the region. Under such circumstances, regions forward to ORC only those requests which have the highest regional priorities.

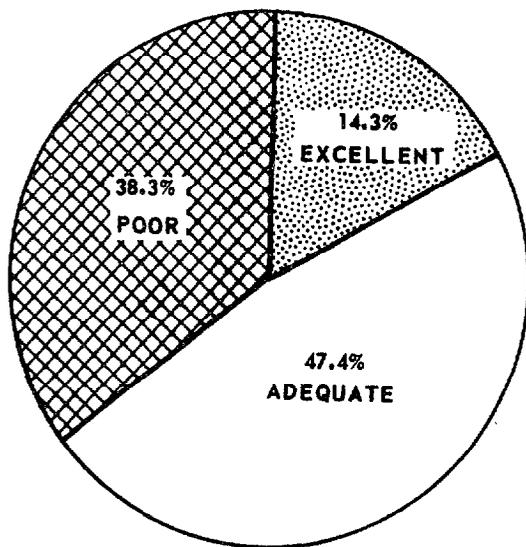
### TRAINING

Preservice training of VISTA volunteers consists of two parts. The first involves general orientation of volunteers, including administrative and organizational matters; the volunteer's role; legal limitation; communications skills; programming techniques; and poverty's dimensions. The second is usually conducted at the volunteer's assigned project to strengthen his work capability for that particular project. It is supposed to address the volunteer's specific needs as they surface.

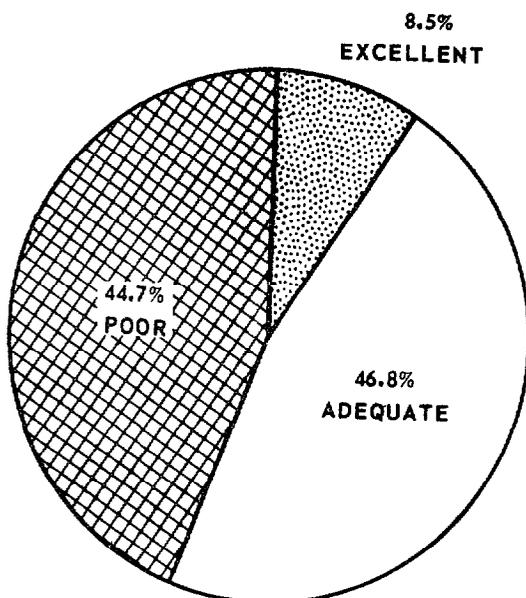
Contractors performed preservice training in the regional offices until fiscal year 1973 when ACTION staff began training volunteers. Region VI first implemented the new policy in January 1973 using regional staff assisted by outside consultants. Beginning in fiscal year 1974, the other regions adopted the new policy. ACTION headquarters officials responsible for VISTA training said this policy was intended to control training consistency, quality, and accountability; achieve substantial cost reductions; and provide more flexibility with better training schedules.

Replies to our questionnaires

We sent questionnaires to 203 of the 767 VISTA volunteers in the two regions and received replies from 97 (48 percent). The following chart shows their opinions of the adequacy of preservice training they received from contractors.



Twenty-three volunteers in region VI indicated they had been trained by ACTION staff. The following chart reflects their opinions of the adequacy of preservice training they received.



Seventy volunteers indicated the training had either not fully prepared them or had left them unprepared to perform their assigned jobs.

The contractor who performed project evaluations for ACTION in fiscal year 1973 reported similar findings. He reported 59 percent of VISTA volunteers interviewed stated only some or none of their preservice training and/or orientation met the needs of their assigned projects. Further, he reported some volunteers had indicated preservice training had not prepared them for specific jobs and had little or no relevance to the community in which they were working.

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In April 1974 the acting region VI director said that when the regional office took over training, it lacked a training component; therefore, the initial training cycle was conducted on an ad hoc basis. He also said the region had just conducted preservice training under a new model with which volunteers indicated satisfaction.

#### PLACEMENT

Volunteers were notified of their assignments during the preservice training period. According to regional officials, ORC, in making its preassignments, has some indication of the applicants' skills, but it is not until the region interviews that the applicants' personal traits and preferences become known. As a result, final applicant assignments sometimes differ from preassignments made by ORC.

We compared ORC preassignments for 40 applicants with their final assignments. After regional office interviews, only 22 applicants (55 percent) were assigned to their preassigned projects.

The regional offices, after interviewing the 40 applicants, had mismatched 12 of them. Following are two examples.

<u>Skill requested</u>	<u>Skills of applicant</u>
Architect	<u>a</u> /Economics and community volunteer worker
Registered nurse	Anthropology and tutoring

a/Subsequently transferred to another project.

An ORC official said such mismatches can occur for any number of reasons such as decreases in training slots, late changes in projects requesting the volunteers, and last minute dropouts from training classes. He said that these unpredictable events require regional officials to alter particular project assignments. Under such circumstances, he said it is difficult to place volunteers ideally in every case.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND  
INSERVICE TRAINING FOR LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

ACTION procedures state VISTA projects should provide inservice career development assistance to all LRVs. LRVs so helped can enhance their opportunities to obtain paid positions using skills and experience gained as volunteers once they have completed their VISTA service. The procedures further state that projects are to meet volunteers' inservice training needs.

In Senate hearings held before passage of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, many LRVs were shown to be former welfare recipients who often returned to welfare rolls when their assignments were completed. To prevent this regression in the future, Section 103(b) of the act requires ACTION to insure that each low-income LRV is provided a career development plan with an opportunity for job advancement or transition to a situation leading to gainful employment. The act further requires that such plans be updated no later than 120 days before volunteer service is completed.

In a memorandum dated December 3, 1973, an ACTION official informed all regional directors that project-evaluation reviews disclosed that career development was not being provided for LRVs. He added only a few regions had placed any importance on followup of projects and volunteers to determine whether they were meeting this requirement.

Of 31 LRVs replying to our questionnaire in the two regions, 20 (65 percent) indicated they were not participating in any inservice training programs.

In region VI the VISTA coordinator told us inservice training had been given a very low priority and, as a result, only a few projects conducted LRV inservice training programs. He said those doing so conducted them on their own initiatives, since the region had given them neither assistance nor encouragement. The Acting Regional Director said on April 15, 1974, that inservice training had been assigned to the newly appointed training officer as one of his highest priorities.

Since September 1974 ACTION has required a signed agreement between ACTION and VISTA projects, stating that the project must provide career development plans and, as specified in the project proposal, assist in providing inservice training to these volunteers. ACTION's Director advised us that regional staffs have been trained on how to support local projects in carrying out these responsibilities.

#### ACTION'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT

On March 15, 1975, ACTION introduced new procedures concerning recruitment, training, and placement of VISTA volunteers which, if followed, should correct the weaknesses disclosed in this report. Also, ACTION is currently evaluating the VISTA program to determine if further improvements are needed.

Under the new procedures, recruitment functions are now the responsibility of five Field Service Centers, each serving two domestic regional offices. When possible, service centers are to slot volunteer applicants in specific assignments at the time they are recruited. This procedure is called "pre-slot recruitment."

Under pre-slot recruitment, the recruiter, after determining the applicant's acceptability, solicits the applicant's program preferences. After determining these, he matches the applicant's skill code against a "pre-slot catalogue," a listing of job descriptions and program positions for which the service center is responsible for providing placements and which outlines project goals and objectives, volunteer duties and responsibilities, and specific volunteer qualifications desired. The program alternatives are discussed with the applicant, and if a potentially satisfactory match is apparent, the recruiter takes steps necessary to effect it. This procedure should reduce the proportion of applicants not reporting to training as well as the mismatches in placement.

ACTION has also revamped its training program for VISTA volunteers. Under its new Integrated Programming and Training System, ACTION has incorporated procedures to assure that all VISTA volunteers are provided with the training needed to effectively carry out their duties in their assigned projects. The ACTION regional offices and local sponsors are to work together to assure that each volunteer is given every possible means to strengthen his or her work capability in a particular project. Providing the volunteer with a specific understanding of their particular job within the context of the community is emphasized. In addition, skill training, either

upgrading or adaptive in nature, is begun during the preservice phase and should continue throughout the volunteer's term of service.

### CONCLUSIONS

Some VISTA applicants have not reported for training because they were not given enough information about what projects they would be assigned to after completing training. Also, mismatches in volunteer placement had occurred. In addition, preservice training given to volunteers in the regions, whether by ACTION or contractor, did not, in the opinion of many volunteers, adequately prepare them for their assignments. After our field review, ACTION introduced new procedures concerning recruitment, training, and placement of VISTA volunteers which, if followed, should correct these weaknesses. Also, ACTION is currently evaluating the VISTA program to determine if further improvements are needed.

We found that requirements of ACTION regulations and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, regarding career development plans and inservice training for LRVs, were not being met. Region VI had given this matter low priority in the past, and replies of LRVs to our questionnaire substantiated this. ACTION now requires a signed agreement making all VISTA projects responsible for providing such plans and training and has trained regional staffs to assist the projects in carrying out these responsibilities.

SUMMARY OF ACTION COMMENTS ON THIS REPORT 1/CHAPTER 2--NEW PROGRAM TESTING  
AND DEVELOPMENT

When ACTION was established, programs such as the Peace Corps and VISTA had had many years of experience in the use of volunteers to carry out health, teaching, and social action programs, both in the U.S. and overseas. Their program emphasis, however, had been on the replication of existing program concepts rather than on development of innovative volunteer programs in these areas. Further, the new agency had no existing models for programs which would concentrate on educational development, manpower training, community planning, and the other areas of potential effort to which the President had directed attention.

Consequently, one of ACTION's first goals was to develop an innovative capability--the ability to develop, test, revise, and demonstrate new or more effective applications of voluntary techniques for meeting community problems. The Office of Policy and Program Development was established in July 1971 when ACTION was first organized, in large measure to carry out this objective.

During its first years, the office sponsored a wide variety of innovative projects in different areas of the country, employing different models for each project, to achieve different types of emphasis within each program. These demonstration models served as pilots for future programs and were continuously monitored by both the Washington and field staff. Also, during this phase, the office solicited proposals for new programs and projects widely; from within the agency and from existing or potential sponsors.

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1/ACTION's Director provided us with written comments and related attachments on October 2, 1975. We did not reproduce the comments due to their length but, instead, are summarizing them in pertinent part in this appendix and have considered them as appropriate in preparing sections of our final report.

The ACTION Order 3000.3 (establishing a Program Development Review Board) was issued when ACTION had had little experience in completing assessments of the new programs it had started to carry out its innovative mandate, and when it had on hand a large number of innovative proposals for new types of assistance. This order was initially useful in assuring that each proposal then on hand received adequate review before testing began.

At this time, we feel that the formal procedures prescribed by ACTION Order 3000.3 are no longer necessary because (1) the backlog of proposed new programs and projects has been eliminated, (2) adequate time is usually available to review new program proposals individually, rather than all at one time, (3) current proposals for new programs are thoroughly reviewed by agency top management, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Congress through the annual appropriations process, (4) after a new program has been authorized for development and testing, management's attention is shifted to the specific experimental projects which must be designed and carried out to make the program a reality, and (5) the experience gained in testing and development since 1973 makes it possible for less formal and more expeditious procedures to be used in making decisions on new project proposals. Therefore, we propose to substantially revise Order 3300.1 to describe the less formal procedures now employed for review of proposed innovative projects.

Procedures now used for approval of new programs, reviews of new project proposals stemming from approved new programs, and recommendations to agency management concerning possible adoption of tested programs, are as follows:

#### Approval of new programs

1. The Policy Development Division of the Office of Policy and Planning is responsible for overseeing the development and testing of new programs, including the particular projects of which they are comprised. Before each such program begins its test and development, the division determines whether the proposed program is consistent with the agency's goals and whether the results of prior demonstration projects have been incorporated.
2. The Division of Planning identifies appropriate milestones for each new program and assures that (1) these are incorporated into the agency's Annual Management by Objectives Operating Plan and (2) its status is regularly reported at quarterly intervals,

thus providing information from which the decisions to adopt, modify, or reject the program may be made.

3. The Division of Budget insures that there are adequate program funds and makes recommendations as to how it should be funded if competition for available funds is involved.

#### Approval of innovative projects

1. The Policy Development Division determines what types of projects should be developed and tested, outlines the project approach, identifies likely sponsors, and works out relationships with other affected agencies.
2. The Division of Evaluation is responsible for reviewing the project design to assure its statistical adequacy before it enters the testing and development phase.
3. The Associate Director for Domestic (or International) Operations participates in site and sponsor selection and assures the involvement of field staff in the operations of the project while under test and development.

#### Recommendations for adoption of experimental programs

The Assistant Director of the Office of Policy and Planning develops recommendations for the approval of the Director (or Deputy Director) as to whether the new program should be incorporated into the ACTION arsenal of operational programs. The appropriate Associate Director also makes his recommendations. The agency head then makes his decision, which is the final step in the process and is made only after the new program has been proven successful.

Our present procedure, though informal, assures us that (1) all program proposals are adequately screened, (2) all innovative projects are properly tested, monitored, and evaluated, and (3) these results are carefully considered before the program becomes operational.

ACTION will revise Order 3000.3 to incorporate the above procedures and will assure that they are consistently followed and the results documented.

CHAPTER 3--EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR PART-TIME VOLUNTEERS

ACTION had no comments on this chapter.

CHAPTER 4--VOLUNTEER PROGRAM COORDINATION

ACTION installed the Integrated Programming and Training System in November 1974 to provide common program goals, policies, and procedures for all regions and to facilitate headquarters and regional monitoring of program process. Some of its most important policies are an insistence that all ACTION program services be considered for integration at the local level and that all present and prospective sponsors be fully apprised of the variety of volunteer programming techniques which the agency had available.

Because of the integrated system, sponsors have easier access to all ACTION resources, either for a multidimensional attack on a single problem by a single sponsor, or by focusing efforts of several sponsors on a group of related problems in a particular locality. The guidebook, Meeting Community Needs through Voluntarism, which ACTION sends to all who inquire about the availability of our several types of programs, explains concisely the purpose, volunteers resource, type and length of volunteer service, and applicant/sponsor requirements for each of our programs. It also illustrates how combined programming works and the advantages of using a combination of ACTION resources to attack a local community problem.

We will take steps, through our Management Information System reports and otherwise, to determine the extent of program integration which is occurring at the local level.

CHAPTER 5--COMBINING FOREIGN  
AND DOMESTIC SERVICE

While we agree with GAO's findings, we believe that experience has proved that this particular goal set by the President was expressed too narrowly; that the major responsibility of ACTION should be to assure that former Peace Corps, VISTA, and other ACTION volunteers do carry the knowledge they have gained as a volunteer with them after they have completed their volunteer assignment and apply this knowledge for the benefit of the Nation, especially if they choose careers in government, education, community and social programs, etc. However, encouraging further volunteer service is also an important part of ACTION's response to this part of its mandate, whether that further service be in

another ACTION program or in part-time work contributed to other forms of voluntary effort.

Since the GAO survey, we have taken further steps to improve our performance in this specific area of assuring further opportunities for volunteer service.

Each Peace Corps and VISTA volunteer receives, approximately 3 months before completion of his enrollment, an explanation of the services provided by ACTION to former volunteers. Included is an order form that the volunteer returns if he wants to receive particular career planning information.

In June 1975 this order was revised to permit the volunteer to request an extension of his present assignment or to request information about joining the Peace Corps or VISTA. This new procedure has not been in effect long enough to determine the results; however, approximately 60 terminating VISTA volunteers have requested information about joining the Peace Corps in the past 3 months.

We will give this area further attention to see if we can increase the present low rate of dual volunteer service.

CHAPTER 6--USE OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL  
VOLUNTEERS OUTSIDE SMALL BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION AREAS

We do not dispute the general findings of the GAO's review concerning the lack of using SCORE/ACE volunteers in other ACTION programs as of early 1974. However, as a result of the agency's policy of integrated programming, much progress had been achieved in using SCORE/ACE volunteers on non-SBA assignments by the end of fiscal year 1975. According to statistics provided to us by SBA, which maintained all records on the assignment and use of SCORE/ACE volunteers, more than half their work during fiscal year 1975 was devoted to non-SBA clients.

Under title III of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, ACTION is undertaking and supporting programs which provide (1) assistance to minorities and other disadvantaged persons seeking to engage in small business enterprises, (2) management counseling to local governments and nonprofit organizations, (3) financial counseling to persons living on fixed or low incomes, and (4) other volunteer activities where business and managerial experience may benefit the community.

In designing these new programs, ACTION will keep in mind the GAO findings insofar as they are applicable to the new situation.

To complete this description of our present activities which facilitate the use of volunteers with business skills to help solve community problems, we have provided the following brief account of the pilot programs we are supporting under title III during fiscal year 1976.

#### Business advice to local governments

An ACTION-sponsored program will encourage members of local business organizations to offer their skills to local governments in improving their taxation, investment, and operating systems.

#### Business counseling of nonprofit organizations

ACTION is working with the National League of Cities and several local governments to develop and test the effectiveness of local business assistance to nonprofit organizations in their cities.

#### Counseling persons on fixed incomes

ACTION will continue three experimental projects which counsel older Americans on fixed incomes, developed in fiscal year 1975. Although each project features a different approach, all three involve the recruitment of both active and retired businessmen with competence in personal budgeting, planned buying and shopping, and consumer protection regulations of State and Federal agencies. These volunteers, usually in teams of three, conduct small workshops and seminars on money management and how to obtain needed social services, which are especially helpful to the elderly living on retirement incomes or to those receiving social security or welfare payments.

#### CHAPTER 7--VISTA VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND PLACEMENT

We believe the steps we have taken to improve our volunteer placement and training procedures, as well as our low income LRV career development planning requirements, have overcome the problems referred to in the GAO report. However, if the results of the current evaluation of the VISTA program indicate that further improvements are required in placement, on-the-job training, and low income LRV career development, we will proceed to do so.

PRINCIPAL ACTION OFFICIALS  
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION  
OF ACTIVITIES  
DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

	<u>Tenure of office</u>	
	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
<b>DIRECTOR:</b>		
Michael P. Balzano, Jr.	Apr. 1973	Present
Walter C. Howe (acting)	Dec. 1972	Apr. 1973
Joseph H. Blatchford	July 1971	Dec. 1972
<b>DEPUTY DIRECTOR:</b>		
John L. Ganley	June 1974	Present
Walter C. Howe	Apr. 1972	May 1974
William W. Inglis (acting)	July 1971	Apr. 1972
<b>ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF DOMESTIC AND ANTI-POVERTY OPERATIONS:</b>		
Ronald D. Gerevas (acting)	Apr. 1975	Present
Edward W. Locke (acting)	Dec. 1974	Apr. 1975
Majorie W. Lynch	Oct. 1973	Dec. 1974
Majorie W. Lynch (acting)	July 1973	Oct. 1973
Christopher M. Mould	Oct. 1972	July 1973
Christopher M. Mould (acting)	July 1971	Oct. 1972
<b>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND PROGRAM PLANNING (note a):</b>		
Harry J. Hogan	Nov. 1973	Present
Harry J. Hogan (assistant director designate)	Oct. 1973	Nov. 1973
Charles W. Ervin	Jan. 1972	Sept. 1973
<b>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF RECRUITMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS (note b):</b>		
Vinette E. Jones (acting)	Apr. 1975	Present
Ronald D. Gerevas	Sept. 1973	Apr. 1975
Ronald D. Gerevas (acting)	Sept. 1973	Sept. 1973
<b>REGION III DIRECTOR:</b>		
Kenneth C. Hill	Aug. 1975	Present
John T. Facenda (acting)	Nov. 1974	Aug. 1975
John F. Torian	Sept. 1973	Nov. 1974
John L. Harrison	Jan. 1972	Sept. 1973
Vincent Godwin	July 1971	Dec. 1971

	<u>Tenure of office</u>	
	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
REGION VI DIRECTOR:		
Joseph Garcia	July 1974	Present
John B. Keller (acting)	Apr. 1974	July 1974
Edward M. Yturri	Jan. 1972	Apr. 1974
William Staton	July 1971	Dec. 1971

a/Before passage of Public Law 93-113 in October 1973, this position was called Associate Director for Policy and Program Development.

b/This position was established in September 1973 when the Office of Citizens Placement and the Office of Public Affairs were combined into the Office of Recruitment and Communications. Also, from September to the passage of Public Law 93-113 in October 1973, this position was called Associate Director for Recruitment and Communications.

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