



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

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MARCH 7, 1980

The Honorable Mario Biaggi
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Human Services
Select Committee on Aging
House of Representatives

HSE04205

026-03077

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Subject: [Opportunities Are Available for ACTION
to Enhance Older American Voluntarism] AGC00349
(HRD-80-58)

As you requested, we have reviewed ACTION's administration of its Older American Volunteer Programs. During our review, we met with your staff several times to advise them on the status of our work. On October 17, 1979--with the agreement of your office--we testified before the Subcommittee on Child and Human Development, Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, regarding the administration, accomplishments, and direction of these programs.

Since it was created in 1971, ACTION has expanded elderly participation in its programs from about 4,000 volunteers to almost 270,000 today, and most of the participants we interviewed were satisfied with their volunteer experiences.

Despite these accomplishments, we noted additional opportunities for ACTION to further stimulate older American voluntarism. Specifically, ACTION should

--ensure that its grantees develop and implement effective procedures and practices for referring elderly applicants who cannot be placed in ACTION programs to other volunteer opportunities in the community,

--establish formal procedures to encourage the use of joint sponsorship arrangements--whereby multiple projects are administered by a single sponsor--to more effectively match community needs and volunteer interests, and



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--define the degree to which it should emphasize the expansion of opportunities for the elderly in public and private sector volunteer programs.

We made our review at ACTION headquarters; the three ACTION regional offices in California, New York, and Texas; and the five ACTION State offices in those States. We also visited nine ACTION projects--a Foster Grandparent, Senior Companion, and Retired Senior Volunteer project in each of the three States. We interviewed officials and reviewed pertinent records at ACTION and the projects. To assess experiences, satisfaction, and coordination, we interviewed 231 current volunteers and 67 persons on waiting lists to become volunteers. We also spoke with representatives of 65 organizations that sponsor two or more projects to obtain their views on joint administration.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Older American Volunteer Program projects are sponsored by public and nonprofit organizations, including State and local governments and private community agencies. Sponsors are responsible for developing, implementing, and managing the projects--including recruitment, selection, assignment, orientation, and training of volunteers. The sponsors arrange volunteers' meals and transportation and assure that volunteers are adequately supervised.

Foster Grandparent Program

The Foster Grandparent Program was created to provide volunteer opportunities for low-income people age 60 years and older to furnish personal support to children with special needs. Foster Grandparents serve on a regular schedule of 4 hours a day, 5 days a week, and are generally assigned to two children, whom they serve individually for about 2 hours each day. The volunteers are paid a stipend of \$2.00 per hour, 1/ are reimbursed for or provided transportation and meals, receive free annual physical examinations, and are entitled to free accident and liability insurance.

1/\$1.60 per hour before October 1, 1979.

Retired Senior Volunteer Program

The Retired Senior Volunteer Program enables volunteers 60 years and older to become involved in community activities and to help people meet their basic human needs--including economic sufficiency, individual rights, health, nutrition, education, housing, energy, and protective and social services. Volunteers must be retired and willing to serve on a volunteer assignment--usually for a given number of hours on a regular basis--without compensation. They average 4 hours of service per week, are reimbursed for or provided transportation and meals, and receive accident and liability insurance.

Senior Companion Program

The Senior Companion Program provides opportunities for low-income persons age 60 years and older to give aid, support, and companionship to adults with exceptional needs. Senior Companions primarily help vulnerable and frail elderly persons maintain independent living in their homes. These volunteers serve 20 hours per week--usually 4 hours a day, 5 days a week. They are paid a stipend of \$2.00 per hour 1/ and are reimbursed for or provided transportation and meals. They also receive annual physical examinations and accident and liability insurance.

Funding and volunteer levels of the Older American Volunteer Programs for fiscal years 1977-80 are shown below:

	Funding			
	Fiscal year			
	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u> (estimated)
	—————(millions)—————			
Foster				
Grandparent	\$34.0	\$34.9	\$34.9	\$46.9
Retired Senior				
Volunteer	19.0	20.1	20.1	26.2
Senior Companion	<u>3.8</u>	<u>7.0</u>	<u>7.0</u>	<u>10.2</u>
Total	<u>\$56.8</u>	<u>\$62.0</u>	<u>\$62.0</u>	<u>\$83.3</u>

1/\$1.60 per hour before October 1, 1979.

	Volunteer levels (estimated)			
	Fiscal year			
	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>
Foster				
Grandparent	15,100	16,500	16,640	16,880
Retired Senior				
Volunteer	228,000	250,000	250,000	274,700
Senior Companion	<u>2,600</u>	<u>3,045</u>	<u>3,300</u>	<u>3,540</u>
Total	<u>245,700</u>	<u>269,545</u>	<u>269,940</u>	<u>295,120</u>

FUTURE DIRECTION OF ACTION
OLDER AMERICAN PROGRAMS

For the Older American Volunteer Programs, ACTION requested \$72 million for fiscal year 1980, an increase of \$10 million over the fiscal year 1979 funding of \$62 million. ACTION intended to use the additional funds for increased stipends, travel reimbursement, and insurance for volunteers and for project administration and training, while keeping the same volunteer levels. ACTION's current funding is \$83.3 million, an \$11.3 million increase over its budget request. ACTION plans to use \$4.1 million of the additional funds to start 30 new projects with a projected strength of over 8,000 volunteers and to expand 170 projects with a projected volunteer increase of 17,000. The remaining money is being used to further increase volunteer stipends, transportation reimbursements, and project administration budgets.

The stipend increase is the first such increase since the program began and raises payments to all low-income volunteers in the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Programs by 25 percent--from \$1.60 to \$2.00 an hour.

VOLUNTEERS' SATISFACTION
WITH PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The volunteers we interviewed were satisfied with the duties they performed and the number of hours they worked. They all expressed the belief that their activities helped the people they served.

Of the 231 volunteers we interviewed

--230 stated that their work was very helpful to the people they served; 1 was a little less enthusiastic, saying it was only somewhat helpful;

--229 said they liked their work very much;

--184 were satisfied with the number of hours worked, 44 wanted more hours of work, and only 3 would have liked fewer hours; and

--227 volunteers planned to stay in their present programs, 3 were uncertain, and only 1 planned to leave.

VOLUNTEERS AWAITING ENROLLMENT
NOT REFERRED TO OTHER PROGRAMS

ACTION's program directives for grantees encourage projects to refer volunteer applicants to non-ACTION programs when the project cannot enroll additional volunteers or when the volunteers are ineligible for the ACTION program. Although there were non-ACTION volunteer programs in each of the communities served by the nine ACTION projects we reviewed, ACTION project staffs generally did not inform volunteer applicants on waiting lists about the other programs. As a result, these applicants have not been provided with all the opportunities to serve their communities.

Each of the three Foster Grandparent and three Senior Companion projects visited maintained waiting lists ranging from 15 to 50 older Americans wanting to serve as volunteers, but because of limited funds for stipends, meals, and transportation, they could not be enrolled. While the three Retired Senior Volunteer projects visited did not maintain formal waiting lists of applicants, two indicated that new volunteer enrollments had been limited because of unavailability of additional funds for meals and transportation.

Officials responsible for eight of the nine ACTION projects said they referred potential volunteers to non-ACTION programs when they could not be placed in the ACTION project. However, our interviews with volunteers on waiting lists indicated that referrals were not being made.

Of the 67 potential volunteers interviewed who were on waiting lists at the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion projects visited

--59 said ACTION project staff had not told them about local non-ACTION volunteer programs,

--28 said they would like to learn about the other local programs, and

--16 said they were not volunteers in a local non-ACTION program because they didn't know of any other programs in the area.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS COULD
BE ENHANCED BY CONSOLIDATING
LOCAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Sponsors of volunteer projects have pointed out that program effectiveness is enhanced when sponsors administer more than one project. However, ACTION has not encouraged this practice. As a result, the agency has not taken full advantage of this form of sponsorship for more effectively matching community needs with volunteer interests.

Of the 862 Older American Volunteer Programs' sponsors operating 199 Foster Grandparent projects, 55 Senior Companion projects, and 682 Retired Senior Volunteer projects during 1979, only 66 sponsors operated two or more projects. At the locations where joint program sponsorships have been implemented, such arrangements offered a greater variety of volunteer opportunities to older Americans in a community than the single-program approach and provided the opportunity to tailor older American program delivery to each community's unique service needs and volunteer availability characteristics.

Joint sponsorship usually involves funding one grantee to operate two or more of ACTION's programs with separate program directors.

Directors of programs under sponsors currently administering more than one volunteer project advised us that joint sponsorship has enhanced program effectiveness by improving such functions as coordination with other projects, volunteer recruitment, and referrals of volunteers to and from other projects and by reducing administrative costs. Many also

believed that joint sponsorship improved fund-raising capabilities and strengthened volunteer training. ACTION regional and State officials and directors of single-sponsor projects in the three States we visited held similar views. These officials did caution, however, that, within the context of joint sponsorship, it was important to maintain the integrity of individual programs to sustain the pride of older Americans who identify closely with the services they perform.

Eleven of the joint sponsors advised us that they were using volunteers from more than one ACTION program to fulfill the service needs at one volunteer station. They indicated that these arrangements were beneficial and that no personnel problems were being experienced where stipended and nonstipended volunteers worked side by side.

PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR
OLDER AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS
NEEDS TO BE EMPHASIZED

The Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-113) requires ACTION to promote meaningful volunteer experiences for older Americans through community service on a national basis, both through its own programs and as a catalyst for other programs with compatible goals. The newly created Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation was established to foster volunteer programs for participation by all segments of the population in domestic programs and international programs, such as the Peace Corps. Without a clear statement of the emphasis that the Office will place on its efforts for increasing programs specifically developed for participation by older Americans, such programs may not get the recognition intended by the act. ACTION needs to define what emphasis its newly established Office will place on stimulating increased volunteer opportunities in other public and private sector programs for elderly persons who desire to serve but have nowhere to enroll.

ACTION has stimulated voluntarism in its Older American Volunteer Programs from about 4,000 volunteers in fiscal year 1971 to almost 270,000 in its three programs in fiscal year 1979, and further expansion is planned in 1980. Based on a national poll completed in 1975 by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., ACTION estimated there was a potential volunteer force of almost 10 million older Americans.

ACTION's efforts to stimulate expanded voluntarism in other public and private sector programs have been changing during the past 4 years. Until 1977 the agency relied on and supported the National Center for Voluntary Action, reorganized in 1979 as the National Center for Citizen Involvement, as a means of stimulating voluntarism in other programs. The Center is a volunteer-oriented organization that provides coordination and information exchange capabilities for supporting and stimulating private and public voluntarism.

In 1977 ACTION discontinued its support of the Center and in March 1978 established its Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation to expand, support, and strengthen voluntary efforts in the public and private sectors. The Center is still operating with financing from other sources in the private and public sectors.

ACTION has stated that it established its Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation to encourage more emphasis at the State and community level on developing volunteer programs. The Office is intended to advocate public and private voluntarism both domestically (through its Volunteers in Service to America, Older American Volunteer, and Urban Volunteer Programs) and internationally (through its Peace Corps program) by providing assistance at the public and private levels to encourage development of voluntary action programs. It also plans to provide technical assistance to sponsors of ACTION programs and to their local communities in establishing volunteer programs and organizing conferences and workshops on voluntarism.

Under the program, ACTION provides statewide offices with funds for collecting information on voluntarism, stimulating volunteer activity in State public programs, and linking public and private sector volunteer activities. ACTION supported Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation programs in eight States in fiscal year 1979 and is planning to expand to additional States during fiscal year 1980. However, ACTION has not yet defined what emphasis the Office will place on encouraging increased voluntarism in programs for older Americans in the private and public sectors as contrasted with other domestic and international volunteer programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTION has expanded participation in its Older American Volunteer Programs while providing satisfying experiences for the volunteers. However, additional opportunities exist for ACTION to further expand voluntarism for many other elderly persons who desire to serve.

We recommend that the Director of ACTION:

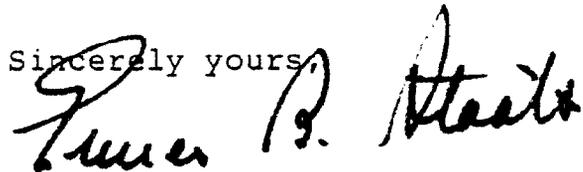
- Ensure that grantees develop and implement effective procedures and practices for referring elderly applicants who cannot be placed in ACTION programs to other volunteer opportunities in the community.
- Establish formal procedures to encourage the use of joint sponsorship arrangements to more effectively match community needs and volunteer interests.
- Define the degree to which ACTION's newly established Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation should emphasize the expansion of opportunities for the elderly in public and private sector volunteer programs.

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We have discussed the information presented in this report with ACTION officials, and their views have been incorporated where appropriate. The agency agreed that joint sponsorship arrangements can enhance program effectiveness, and it plans to evaluate the implementation of its guidelines for the Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation.

As agreed with your office, we are providing copies of this report to the Subcommittee on Child and Human Development of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources and the Director of ACTION and will make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,



Comptroller General
of the United States