

**Delta State University
Center for Community Development
AmeriCorps Programs**

For the past six years, the Center for Community Development has maintained AmeriCorps programs designed to infuse the Delta region with opportunities to address such critical issues as childhood literacy, community development, youth development, housing assistance, and technology adoption. This relationship has been beneficial to the Center for Community Development, the AmeriCorps members, and to the region that they serve. However, due to management decisions on the part of the Corporation for National and Community Service, such programs may disappear in the region. This strategy is due:

- because of decisions at CNCS that awarded funds/member slots to programs without sufficient funds (\$100,000,000) in the Education Trust and
- because of a decision to spend interest that accumulated on Education Trust Funds (\$64,000,000) rather than return them to the federal government and
- because OMB ruled that CNCS has to repay the \$64,000,000 and
- because congressionally approved funds for AmeriCorps this year were level rather than 50% higher than last year (as recommended by President Bush) and
- because management at CNCS has decided to liquidate the outstanding obligations with 2003 funds

Currently, the OMB has made the recommendation that the current cap of 50,000 AmeriCorps membership slots be reduced to 4,500 slots for the coming year. This will result in the dissolving of most if not all the programs in the Mississippi Delta.

Two possible ways the situation could possibly be made better:

- President Bush has asked Congress for legislation absolving the \$64,000,000 debt for the interest CNCS spent. So far no action has been taken on this request.
- There is a movement from state commissions to get congress to appropriate supplemental funds for AmeriCorps for 2003 to prevent the harmful effects of a 30% cut. Senator Kennedy was thought to be introducing an amendment to the supplemental funding bill that provided funds for the war with Iraq, but his office thought it better to hold it for later. Now we wait and see, but time is running out.

It is necessary to point out some of the impacts that the AmeriCorps programs running in the Center on the Delta region.

During the year of service, each AmeriCorps member serving in one of the three AmeriCorps programs in the Center receives a living allowance of \$9600.00. With 265 full-time members serving through the Center, \$2,880,000 of spendable income is generated for the region through the stipend payment.

Upon successful completion of a year of service, each member receives an educational award of \$4725.00. If all full-time members serving in the Center complete their year of service, \$1,252,125.00 will be available to support education costs and institutions in the Delta.

A comprehensive professional development training program offered to AmeriCorps members provides opportunities to develop additional skills, gain valuable experience and help achieve the skills and education needed for productive, active citizenship. Sessions include CPR, tutor certification, conflict resolution and communication skills. This training provides significant human development outcomes for this economically distressed region.

AmeriCorps members serve as teacher assistants, providers of technical assistance, and mentors. Dissolving of the AmeriCorps programs will devastate the region, already suffering in a troublesome economic climate. Schools that have budgeted for AmeriCorps members to serve in their classrooms will be forced to find other means of assistance and in many cases, there will be none. These programs also provide jobs for staff of the programs. They also provide members with both economic and educational incentives to provide meaningful service in their communities. It provides those communities educational and economic viability that would not exist in the absence of these programs.

The fact is that the AmeriCorps programs operating in the Center for Community Development and around the State are having impacts on the day-to-day reality of the State's residents. Specifically, in the Delta, the AmeriCorps programs provide avenues for development, social action, and opportunity that otherwise would not exist. A short description of two of the programs operating in the Center for Community Development is provided below.

Mississippi Delta Service Corps

The Mississippi Delta, which comprises the majority of the state's Second Congressional District, is the third poorest Congressional District in the United States. Pervasive rural poverty such as poor housing, illiteracy, low employment, high crime, and high teenage pregnancy rates and poor health conditions dominate the social and economic environment in the Mississippi Delta. The mission of Mississippi Delta Service Corps is to "create positive change across the Delta through service." This program has a well-documented history of effectively serving the needs of the Delta's most impoverished. Below, is a summary of the program's accomplishments of the past three years. During the past three years:

Two hundred and fifty four MDSC members received training to enhance their skills in Conflict Management, Team Building, Leadership, Communication, Public Presentations, CPR/First-Aid and training in site specific areas such as literacy, technology, community education, early childhood development and youth enrichment. Ninety-percent of the members receiving the training reported an increase in the skills needed to perform effectively at the sites.

Two hundred and fifty four MDSC Members provided 464,677 hours of service to more than 36,000 beneficiaries through the Mississippi delta. MDSC Members recruited and supervised more than 7,228 volunteers who served approximately 81,172 hours helping the communities achieve positive outcomes.

One hundred and twenty one Corps members engaged in structured tutorial activities in 30 low resource schools, with 1703 students in grades K-12. These students were in the bottom quartile of the class. One-on-one sessions were held four days per week resulting in 75.63 percent of the children tutored increasing their academic skills.

Thirteen Corps members helped construct adequate and affordable housing for 18 low-income families in the Coahoma County area. Approximately 120 people were beneficiaries of these homes.

Thirty-four Corps members served as community educators and established 112 partnerships in the 25 rural communities and reported an increase in citizen participation, and community involvement.

Forty-seven Corps members served in educational, recreational, and after school enrichment programs, five days per week serving 1674 children. Seventy-six percent of the children showed improvement in social skills, their attendance in school improved, had fewer discipline problems and improved their grades in the subject in which they were tutored.

Thirteen Corps members delivered computer literacy skills to 1156 students, parents, and teachers. At least 87 percent of individuals receiving the service made good to excellent progress in the ability to use the internet, software, and to troubleshoot computer problems.

Thirty-nine Corps members were involved in teaching parenting skills and improving parent involvement. The number of parents and community members serving in schools increased by 43 percent.

Delta Reads Partnership

The mission of Delta Reads Partnership is to improve the reading levels of students in grades K-6 (ages 5-12) by involving AmeriCorps members, parents, guardians, teachers, school administrators, community groups, and regional organizations in effective tutorial programs in reading for children in educationally and economically distressed communities in the Delta. DRP has been successful in doing so by increasing the literacy level among students by one-on-one tutoring sessions with children from the lowest quartile of their grades. This has been accomplished through the use of creative and practical tutorial interventions by Corps members and volunteers as reading tutors for elementary children, by enhancing reading materials at each school, and by enlisting support for literacy programs and volunteer service from community and regional organizations.

Delta Reads Partnership (DRP) is now in its sixth year of operation in the Mississippi Delta. Helping students increase reading skills is a major focus of the program. During the last three years, approximately 230 DRP members provided tutorial assistance in

reading to more than 5,000 students in grades K – 6. DRP has made dramatic improvements in outreach and scope over that time period. This summary highlights DRP's accomplishments and outcomes for the past three academic years.

Academic Year 1999 – 2000 About 855 students were tutored during the school day and after school by 50 DRP members. More than 740 volunteers recruited by DRP served 4,713 hours in projects implemented by DRP. Students gained an average of one year and two months in reading by the end of the school year. Forty-three members met tutor certification requirements and were certified as tutors. Members made more than 1,600 parent contacts.

Academic Year 2000 – 2001 DRP increased members from 50 to 100 with 19 partner sites. Approximately 2,441 students were tutored during the school day and after school. The number of volunteers increased to 4,855 serving 15,704 hours. Students gained an average of one year and six months by the end of the school year. DRP partnered with First Book to obtain 4,000 books for the children being tutored by members. Members made 5,291 direct contacts with parents which resulted in more parent involvement in school activities.

Academic Year 2001 - 2002 Eighty DRP members tutored about 2,196 students during the day and in after school programs. Approximately 812 volunteers served 2,576 hours in school-related activities or service projects. Post-intervention assessment results indicated increases in literacy rates. For example, grade two total scores improved 26 points. Teacher survey reports indicate that 80% of the students tutored by DRP improved in classroom performance. Reports indicate 2,574 newsletters were sent to parents resulting in 73% of those parents becoming involved with school related activities. All members completed CPR certification.

As demonstrated by these examples, the AmeriCorps programs operating in the Center for Community Development greatly impact the Delta region. The economic impacts of the programs provide further evidence of their relative impacts on the region. The following is taken from a study conducted by Dr. Harrison Campbell on the economic impacts of the Center for Community Development. Specifically, regarding the impact of the AmeriCorps programs, Dr. Campbell noted the following.

Program Costs.

- Expressed at constant 2000 price levels, total costs of the AmeriCorps programs are \$11.9 million over the 1995-2002 period, the present value of which is \$10.3 million.

Program Benefits.

- 855 AmeriCorps members have engaged in approximately 1.2 million hours of service. Given prevailing wage rates, and adjusting for inflation, the value of labor input for these activities is nearly \$15 million, the present value of which is about \$13.3 million.
- Over the seven-year time period, 855 AmeriCorps members have engaged in approximately 1.2 million hours of service. Given prevailing wage rates, and adjusting for inflation, the value of labor input for these activities is nearly \$15 million, the present value of which is about \$13.3 million.

Value of Volunteers.

- Corps members recruited over 34,000 people who volunteered 237,000 hours of time. In assigning a value to volunteer hours of service, we can look to the Independent Sector, a not-for-profit organization, for guidance on this subject.
- The hourly value of volunteer time in 2002 was equivalent to the average hourly wage for nonagricultural workers, or \$16.05 per hour.
- The average hourly wage of nonagricultural workers in Mississippi was \$12.31 in 2001.
- Using the state average for nonagricultural workers and adjusting for inflation over the seven-year period, the total value of volunteer time is estimated to have been worth just over \$3 million, the present value of which is \$2.6 million.
- Using the national averages as reported by Independent Sector would produce a total value of volunteer value of about \$4 million.

AmeriCorps Post-Service Returns to Education.

- After serving their term of service, full-time AmeriCorps members earn an education award of \$4,725 (\$2,350 for part-time members).
- It is estimated that the total (future) value of added earnings from AmeriCorps members' investment in education ranges from approximately \$100 million to \$125 million, the present value of which is approximately \$58-\$70 depending on utilization assumptions.
- It is estimated that the present value of added to the educational investment by AmeriCorps members ranges between \$5,827,343 and \$7,021,910.

As demonstrated above, the AmeriCorps programs operating in the Center for Community Development have a definitive impact on the Delta region. Not only do they provide opportunities for members for personal growth, the programs provide invaluable

services to their communities that might not otherwise take place. It is impractical at best to assume that with the proposed cuts to the AmeriCorps members and programs that our schools will be able to continue to provide the assistance that our students so desperately need. It is also unlikely that other initiatives will step forward to fill the void left by the absence of these programs. The Delta will only suffer for the elimination or reduction in these programs.

The Center for Community Development has requested the following programs to be supported under the terms of the competitive grant process.

Delta Reads Partnership AmeriCorps Program – 3-year renewal grant - \$4,514,613.00

Mississippi Delta Service Corps AmeriCorps Program – 3-year renewal grant - \$7,606,962

Early Literacy Corps AmeriCorps Program – 3-year new grant - \$3,034,539

Losing these programs will have a direct affect on the Center for Community Development's staff, partners, and students. The benefits of these programs will disappear with these programs if action is not taken. If Congress does not allocate \$250 million in supplemental funds immediately, AmeriCorps will not have new members this fall. This is because the scholarship money needed to pay all members in full must be in the National Trust before members can start. AmeriCorps and other national service programs are grassroots – real people helping real people on a day-by-day basis. AmeriCorps and other national service programs help fulfill the President's stated national priority for each American to give 4,000 hours of service over the course of a lifetime. AmeriCorps and other national service programs not only encourage young people to serve, but allow them to earn scholarship money to further their own education. AmeriCorps is a win-win proposal for everyone. Therefore, we urge our leaders at the local, state, and national level to speak out to save the AmeriCorps programs with their voices and their votes.