

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

**PRELIMINARY PERFORMANCE
REVIEW OF THE**

**COMMISSION ON NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY
SERVICE**

Commission Has Been Successful, But
Faces Federal Funding Cuts

**Performance Evaluation and Research Division
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PE 96-01-42

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May 1996

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May 19, 1996

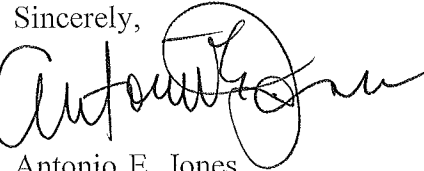
The Honorable A. Keith Wagner
State Senate
Box 446
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The Honorable Joe Martin
House of Delegates
Building 1, Room 213E
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Gentlemen:

This is to provide you with a Preliminary Performance Review of the Commission on National and Community Service, which will be reported to the Joint Committee on Government Operations on Sunday, May 19, 1996. The overall issue covered herein is "Commission Has Been Successful, But Faces Federal Funding Cuts."

Let us know if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Antonio E. Jones

AEJ/wsc

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Executive Summary

The West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service (WVCNCS) was created in January 1994 by executive order as a response to the passing of the federal National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-82). The commission was codified by the Legislature through H.B. 2042 during the 1995 Regular Session. The commission's mission is to be proactive in the support of community-based initiatives to build stronger communities and enhance existing relationships that address local educational, community development, economic, health, environmental, and other social/cultural needs by identifying and involving diverse community service volunteers.

The Performance Evaluation and Research Division (PERD) examined the minutes, various reports and other related records of the Commission. The Commission was very active as evidenced by its nine meetings in 1994 and 10 meetings in 1995, with a two-year meeting attendance average of 70%.

The Commission tripled the state's participation in the federal AmeriCorps program from 58 participants in 1994 to 188 in 1995. The Commission now brings in over \$800,000 annually in federal grants. The Commission has been active in conducting outreach activities to community-based organizations (CBOs). Since the Commission's inception, it has provided technical assistance and other services to 88 CBOs statewide. The Commission has conducted community forums throughout the state to identify the most critical needs in the area of volunteer service.

The Commission faces the strong possibility of having a significant portion or all of its federal funding cut from the next congressional budget.

The Commission performed in a satisfactory manner in the areas that were included in the scope of the review. However, the probable reduction or loss of federal funding needs to be addressed if the Legislature wishes this Commission to continue in its current form.

Review Objective, Scope and Methodology

This review of the West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service (WVCNCS) was conducted in accordance with the West Virginia Sunset Law, Chapter 4, Article 10, Section 11 of the *West Virginia Code*, as amended. Preliminary performance reviews are intended to assist the Joint Committee on Government Operations in making one of five recommendations. These recommendations include:

- The department, agency or board be terminated as scheduled;
- The department, agency or board be continued and reestablished;
- The department, agency or board be continued and reestablished, but the statutes governing it be amended in specific ways to correct ineffective or discriminatory practices or procedures, burdensome rules and regulations, lack of protection of the public interest, overlapping of jurisdiction with other governmental entities, unwarranted exercise of authority either in law or fact or any other deficiencies;
- A performance audit be performed on a department, agency or board on which a preliminary review has been completed; or
- The department, agency or board be continued for a period of time not to exceed one year for the purpose of completing a full performance audit.

A preliminary performance review as defined in Chapter 4, Article 10, Section 3 of the *West Virginia Code*, as amended, is to determine the goals and objectives of a department, agency, or board and to determine the extent to which the plan of a department, agency or board has met or is meeting those goals and objectives. The criteria for a preliminary performance review set forth in Chapter 4, Article 10, Section 11 of the *West Virginia Code*, as amended, enable the determination of the following:

- If the department, board or agency was created to solve a problem or provide a service;
- If the problem has been solved or the service has been provided;
- The extent to which past board or agency activities and accomplishments, current projects and operations, and planned activities and goals for the future are or have been effective;
- The extent to which there would be significant and discernible adverse effects on the public, health, safety or welfare if the board or agency were abolished; and
- Whether or not the board or agency operates in a sound fiscal manner.

This preliminary performance review of the WVCNCS began with a planning process. The planning process proceeded with a risk analysis of the Commission's mission in which the possible risks associated with that purpose were defined. The risk analysis included an

assessment of the following components:

1. Meeting activity of the Commission.
2. What the Commission has done in regards to the AmeriCorps program.
3. What the Commission has done in locating and coordinating community-based organizations.
4. The consequences if federal funding is cut.

The time period covered by the preliminary review includes the years 1994 through 1995. Information about the Commission was obtained through interviews and telephone interviews with the Commission's director; recipients of services provided by the Commission and the Corporation for National Service Budget Office in Washington D.C.; review of relevant statutes in the *West Virginia Code*; review of relevant statutes in the federal code; review of the minutes of Commission meetings; and review of various documents provided by the Commission and the Governor's Office.

**MISSION OF THE WEST VIRGINIA COMMISSION
FOR
NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

The West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service was created in January 1994 by executive order as a response to the passing of the federal National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, P.L. 103-82. The commission was codified by the Legislature through H.B. 2042 from the 1995 Regular Session. **The commission's mission is to be proactive in the support of community-based initiatives to build stronger communities and enhance existing relationships that address local educational, community development, economic, health, environmental, and other social/cultural needs by identifying and involving diverse community service volunteers.** The Commission is to convene at the call of the director at least twice a year.

The idea to create this entity was a result of the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act. The Act stipulated that states could receive federal funds from the newly-created Corporation for National Service if they establish a state-level agency to implement the Act.

The Commission is in charge of administering the AmeriCorps program for the state. The AmeriCorps program is meant to be a "Peace Corps" that serves the disadvantaged areas within the United States rather than overseas. Participants accepted into the program work on public service projects for a specific amount of time: 1700 hours per year for full-time and 900 hours per year for part-time. Participants receive a small stipend which is roughly equivalent to minimum wage while they work. Once they have completed the required number of service hours, they receive a post-service educational award, \$4,725 for full-time and \$2,363 for part-time. Participants can take up to seven years to use the award to pay for higher education or vocational training, or to pay-off college loans.

The Commission's main objective, however, is to identify, assist and coordinate with other service organizations especially the smaller community-based organizations throughout the state so as to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of volunteer services. The main objective of the Commission was in response to a federal act and it is useful and timely because Congress is now going to cut back on social programs.

ISSUE AREA 1: THE COMMISSION HAS BEEN VERY ACTIVE.

According to *West Virginia Code* §5-26A-3, the Commission must have no fewer than 15 and no more than 25 voting members. The makeup of the Commission must meet certain background requirements as well. Presently, the Commission has 24 voting members and one ex officio, nonvoting member. Makeup of the Commission's membership adheres to the requirements stated in §5-26A-2 of the *West Virginia Code*.

The members of the Commission began meeting in March 1994. Although the Commission is only required to meet at least twice per year, according to the *West Virginia Code*, it met a total of nine times, including one executive committee meeting. These meetings had an average attendance of 79% of the Commission members. The Commission met 10 times in 1995, including three executive committee meetings. These meetings had an average attendance of 62%. This gives the Commission a two year average of 70%.

ISSUE AREA 2: AMERICORPS PARTICIPATION IN THE STATE HAS TRIPLED IN TWO YEARS.

AmeriCorps is a national initiative similar to the Peace Corps.¹ AmeriCorps service programs must fall into at least one of four national issue priority areas: public safety, environment, human needs and education.

The Commission is responsible for administering the AmeriCorps program for West Virginia. The program had 58 participants distributed across 31 sites throughout the state in 1994. In 1995, the number of individuals participating in the program jumped to 188 distributed throughout 71 sites in the state. The Commission also provides training to both AmeriCorps participants and program supervisors.

¹To eliminate any confusion between VISTA and AmeriCorps, VISTA focuses primarily on service to increasing the capability of low-income people to improve the conditions of their lives. This program is federally-operated. AmeriCorps focuses on community service in the national priority areas of public safety, environment, human needs and education. This program is operated by the state through federal grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service. However, there are three AmeriCorps programs in the state that receive grants directly from the Corporation.

ISSUE AREA 3: THE COMMISSION HAS DONE OUTREACH WORK WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOs).

The *West Virginia Code* requires the Commission to conduct outreach activities that identify, assist and coordinate community-based organizations (CBOs are the volunteer service agencies that exist throughout the state). Since the Commission's inception, it has provided services to 88 CBOs. These services include technical assistance such as training CBOs in the field to become better at providing service, improving management processes, recruiting service volunteers, fund-raising and grant writing. The Commission provides such services in order to help make recipient CBOs more effective organizations and better at enhancing volunteer services in the state.

The Commission conducted 12 forums throughout the state in an effort to identify the state's needs regarding volunteer service. The top 17 service needs identified in the forums ranked in order of importance, dealt with the following subject matter:

- Life skills
- Service coordination
- Tutoring and mentoring
- After-school programs
- Water and sewer
- Health and wellness
- Volunteers
- Parenting
- Housing
- Job skills/career education
- Conflict resolution
- Natural environment
- Child care
- Transportation
- Recycling
- Elderly
- Domestic violence

The Commission followed-up on these areas brought out by the forums with focus group meetings in Clarksburg, Romney, Athens and Huntington.

ISSUE AREA 4: CONSEQUENCES TO THE COMMISSION IF FEDERAL FUNDING IS CUT.

The Commission faces some potentially severe consequences if its federal funding is cut. It seems likely that funding for AmeriCorps and administration grants may be reduced or completely eliminated (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

FISCAL YEAR 1995 FUNDING*	
TYPE	AMOUNT
Administration Grant (Federal)	\$177,968
Program Development Assistance and Training (Federal)	78,425
AmeriCorps Grants (Federal)	647,635
State Match (State)	50,000
TOTAL	954,028

*Federal Fiscal Year (November 1, 1994 through October 30, 1995)

If this happens to funding for AmeriCorps grants only, the Commission will still be able to operate. However, if federal funding allotted for the administration grant for the Commission is cut, the Commission will have difficulty in doing its activities. The Commission has been directed by the commissioners to prepare a plan for different levels of funding in case this happens. Their plan gives the following three scenarios:

1. **Flat level funding \$177,968, with no increases.** The Commission, with a three person staff, can function well at its current level of funding. The Commission expects to be able to raise funds for training and technical assistance from other sources even if no Program Development Assistance and Training (PDAT) funds are available. The focus of that funding would be the volunteer and community service community, not just AmeriCorps. This fund development effort, including a state volunteer community service conference, is targeted as feasible, particularly if the Commission can maintain government support in FY 1996 and develop ties with the governor taking office in 1997. For West Virginia, it would be difficult to maintain national identity activities without PDAT funds, but core skills training and much more community-based organization development could take place.

2. **Reduced level of funding.** With a 40% cut, or \$106,000, the Commission could support two positions, a program officer and an administrative assistant, and have \$30,000 left for all other needs. This scenario would involve moving the Commission's office. A number of basic program monitoring and support functions could continue.

3. **No federal funding and \$50,000 continued state government support.** This scenario might support one position without health benefits. It is the task of a resource development committee of the Commission to plan for this possibility to determine whether a job description could be justified for retaining a Commission staff. A part-time contracted position could coordinate a small program of training and technical assistance.

Additional consequences that may result if the Commission loses funding for AmeriCorps are the loss of services provided by AmeriCorps participants who are working with CBOs throughout the state. AmeriCorps members are providing services that are not being provided by other staff within these organizations. Examples of such activities include doing outreach services to increase the immunization rate of children in Kanawha County; repairing homes for low-income families in Fayette County; and providing over 18,300 hours of service at sites throughout the state for the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, just to name a few.

Consequences may result if the Commission loses funding for its administration grant. The Commission may be forced to cease its operations. Community-based organizations will not receive training and technical assistance services that are designed to make these organizations more efficient and effective at providing volunteer service. Such training and technical assistance would include how to apply for public and foundation grants or how to enhance recruiting.

The Commission has begun seeking avenues to obtain alternate sources of funding. One avenue that the Commission is taking is researching the legal implications of restructuring itself to become a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in order to better position itself to seek funds from the private sector and from foundations.

CONCLUSION

The West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service has been satisfactory in its performance in the areas looked at in the review. However, the Commission does face serious problems in the future if its federal funding is cut in the next congressional budget. If the Commission loses all of its AmeriCorps funding, it will still be able to operate and carry-out its duties. However, if all federal funding is cut, the Commission will need funds to operate. This year the operating expenses of the Commission were \$177,968. The Legislature must decide how to fund the Commission if it wishes to continue the Commission in its present form.

Recommendation

In case of loss of federal funding, the Legislature should consider other sources of funding for the Commission if it wishes to continue the present Commission.

APPENDIX A

Commission for National WEST VIRGINIA and Community Service

May 10, 1996

Antonio E. Jones, Ph.D., Director
West Virginia Legislature
Performance Evaluation and Research Division
Building 5, Room 751A
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Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0592

Dear Doctor Jones:

On behalf of the Commission, I want to thank you for the Preliminary Performance Review dated April 24. Staff and Commissioners were pleased with the positive observations and recommendations outlined in the review. We like to think of ourselves as a hardworking group of West Virginians dedicated to advancing the traditional ethic of service, and we found it gratifying for our efforts to be recognized by the Legislature.

I am pleased to report that the federal funding picture has improved dramatically since the performance review was written. The fiscal year 1996 budget, passed by Congress at the end of April, funded the AmeriCorps National Service program at \$402.5 million. While this figure is less than the previous fiscal year's budget of \$470 million, it represents a complete reversal of the initial proposals for the program's elimination, on the table when you conducted your review. What this means for West Virginia is that Commission administrative and AmeriCorps program funds will be available in 1996-97 at roughly the current level. On May 1 the Commission submitted a grant application to the Corporation for National Service for \$675,167 in AmeriCorps local program funds, and we are quite confident that AmeriCorps will continue to meet basic community needs in the areas of public safety, education, human needs, and the environment.

You may also be interested in knowing that the Corporation for National Service is building even stronger bipartisan support for AmeriCorps in Washington. Sen. Charles Grassley, a Republican from Iowa and a longtime opponent of National Service, has been working with Corporation CEO Harris Wofford to cut costs. Sen. Grassley has endorsed the program with several important changes that tighten and focus the program even more to serve as a model for the kind of partnerships between government and the volunteer service community that are essential if government is to be reinvented.

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May 10, 1996
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As you know, the Commission's legislative mandate includes the support of volunteer service of all kinds. The response to the Commission's outreach efforts has been so substantial that we are looking for new ways to build the infrastructure of service in the state. To create more options for the support of volunteer service efforts, the Commission has been working diligently to establish a nonprofit tax-exempt organization that would enable the Commission to raise private, non-governmental funds to support its efforts. In this way, the Commission will be able to develop resources independent of federal or state funding changes to support the volunteer service community.

The Commission looks forward to legislative interims beginning May 19. Because of scheduling conflicts, neither Commission chair Rachel Tompkins nor myself will be able to appear before the Legislature; however, a couple of our Commissioners will attend to represent the valuable work the Commission has accomplished over the past two years.

Please contact me as soon as you know more details about the time and location of the interim meetings so that I can relay the information to these Commissioners. Again, thank you for conducting such a thorough review of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jean Ambrose
Executive Director