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April 10, 1995

**DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR FOOD, NUTRITION,
AND CONSUMER SERVICES**

FROM: Joel Berg *JB*
Director of National Service

SUBJECT: FNCS' Participation in AmeriCorps/USDA for 1996

ISSUE:

First, I would like to thank you for your tremendous support of the Department's AmeriCorps program during Fiscal Year 1995. The five Anti-Hunger, Nutrition, and Empowerment projects have been extremely successful so far, particularly in promoting nutrition education for schoolchildren. I have just completed a visit to the anti-hunger project site in Mississippi (Humphreys and Sunflower Counties), where it is graphically evident that USDA's AmeriCorps Members are performing critical community services based on mainstream values supported by both parties.

We are now in the process of planning our second year of AmeriCorps USDA operations, and the time has come to finalize commitments from the participating agencies, such as yours, for both cash and staff contributions for Fiscal Year (FY) 1996.

Because the Department's AmeriCorps application is due to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) on April 28, a decision needs to be made within a week about funding next year's anti-hunger program.

BACKGROUND:

I would like to share with you one of the more dramatic examples of the Anti-Hunger Teams' success and effectiveness: a young pregnant woman in rural Mississippi, who was dangerously losing weight during her pregnancy because she could not afford the food or the prenatal care she needed, was turned away from the local food stamp office when she went in to apply for assistance. (We are also investigating, through the appropriate channels, the circumstances that empowered the local caseworker to refuse to take this young woman's application based on that caseworker's personal bias against the Food Stamp Program in general.)

Fortunately, Members of the AmeriCorps/USDA Anti-Hunger Team were able to provide the young woman with referrals to both WIC and Food Stamps, and she was then able to start receiving benefits. Her physician told her that the intervention of AmeriCorps/USDA Members essentially saved the life of the young woman's unborn child.

Obviously, not every AmeriCorps activity is going to be a life-saving event, but this example does bear out our conviction that all 150 AmeriCorps Members working in the anti-hunger projects have grasped, and been very successful in, spreading the message to low-income families that there is a great deal more involved in fighting hunger than simply enrolling people in the Food Stamp Program. In fact, the majority of projects underway in these five sites have focused primarily on improving the nutritional status of low-income Americans through a variety of methods, such as nutrition education, promotion of the School Breakfast and Summer Food Service Programs, WIC referrals, Earned Income Tax Credit outreach to eligible recipients, and school/urban gardening initiatives. They have actively supported and promoted the FNCS goals through school-based nutrition education presentations and gardening projects, such as the one that you visited in Los Angeles last December. We also plan to involve the Anti-Hunger Teams in FCS' Children's Nutrition Campaign in the very near future.

Based on the site visits that both Donna Hines (the Food and Consumer Services' AmeriCorps liaison and Anti-Hunger Project Coordinator) and I have made, as well as the accomplishments detailed in the first quarter reports, I am more convinced than ever that **AmeriCorps is an important tool in building public, Congressional, and media support for USDA's food assistance programs.** Additionally, AmeriCorps/USDA anti-hunger projects have been extremely effective in building bridges between the Department and grass-roots community organizations dedicated to fighting hunger in America, and have also helped to fill some of the gaps that exist in local food assistance offices where the existing infrastructures are no longer sufficient to cope with the current demands for services.

In spite of the fact that FCS' matching contribution to USDA's AmeriCorps Program was relatively small (\$350,000) for the first year of operation, the five anti-hunger projects received \$2.3 million of the total \$2.6 million grant from CNCS this fiscal year. USDA's AmeriCorps anti-hunger Teams have clearly demonstrated that they can --- and do --- play a vital role in fighting hunger in America while furthering the mission and objectives of FCS. We have also recently learned that AmeriCorps Members working with the Department's Rural Development Teams across the country are actually performing some anti-hunger work as well. In fact, the Rural Development Team has requested training in the basics of USDA's food assistance programs so that they can provide accurate referral information to those families who are in need.

I do understand that the funding structure of FCS is one that does not allow for a great deal of latitude in how appropriated funds are disbursed; however, it is essential that FCS provide continued evidence of your support for this Presidential initiative in order for the Department be able to continue the AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger projects. **As a point of reference, other agencies are contributing over \$25 million, including about \$10 million each from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Forest Service.** Consequently, the senior managers in these agencies have called for a more equitable distribution of Corporation monies in FY 1996. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Corporation funds continue to be very limited.

Regardless of the level of cash funding FCS is able to provide, it is extremely important that the full-time staff person (Donna Hines) continue to be assigned, as a GS-13, to work with USDA's National Service for the rest of FY 1995 and the entirety of FY 1996. Please keep in mind that, in addition to her duties related to oversight of the Department's anti-hunger projects, Donna also serves as the FCS liaison to other USDA agencies, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and all of the "outside" groups, organizations, and individuals who are interested in any aspect of the AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger program. In-kind support, i.e., occasional supplies and a minimal, reasonable amount of travel funding is also essential to the successful oversight of the AmeriCorps/USDA Anti-Hunger projects. NRCS and the other agencies involved in the Department's National Service operations have all assigned multiple staff to work with AmeriCorps, and while I am satisfied with the work that Donna is doing, I must point out once again that FCS is receiving the bulk of the monetary support while providing only minimal support in terms of both cash and staffing.

Given that, in the past few weeks, President Clinton has consistently reinforced his belief that AmeriCorps is a vital centerpiece of his Presidency, I hope we can count on your continued or expanded support for this critical initiative. Funding options are listed below.

I am available to discuss this matter with you in greater detail, at your earliest convenience. Please feel free to contact me, at 720-6350. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

OPTIONS:

1. FCS will provide \$350,000 in agency funds in order to sustain the participation and support of the five existing AmeriCorps/USDA anti-hunger projects in Vermont, the District of Columbia, Milwaukee, the Mississippi Delta, and Los Angeles during FY 1996. *This year*
2. FNS will provide \$700,000 in agency funds in order to sustain the participation of the five existing projects listed in Option 1, plus the addition of one new project (in a location to be determined through a fair and open competition) during FY 1996.
3. FNS will provide \$1,000,000 in agency funds in order to sustain the participation of the five existing projects listed in Option 1, plus the addition of two new projects (in a location to be determined through a fair and open competition) during FY 1996.

DECISION BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR FOOD, NUTRITION, AND CONSUMER SERVICES:

Approve Option #1

Approve Option #2

Approve Option #3

Disapprove

Discuss with me

Date

cc. William Ludwig



DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY/DEPUTY SECRETARY

THROUGH: Ali Webb *Ali Webb*
Director
Office of Communications

FROM: Joel Berg *JB 7/29/94*
Director of National Service
Office of Communications

SUBJECT: Upcoming AmeriCorps Events

*Schedule
Dated 7.*

Per our discussion, I will work with Eloise to set-up a time you can visit our Mississippi AmeriCorps projects once they are up and running this September. In addition, I would like you to consider two other important events:

ISSUE A - Meeting with the AmeriCorps/USDA Site Managers

Background:

From Monday, August 8th through Friday, August 12th, approximately 200 people who will be managing USDA AmeriCorps projects will gather in Washington and at the 4-H Center in Chevy Chase for an intensive training program. Most of those in attendance will be USDA employees, but some will be employees of anti-hunger groups or youth service organizations. For at least half a day during the week, all training participants will join the young people in our DC summer program to perform community service. Senator Leahy has indicated his desire to attend the kick-off on the afternoon of the 8th.

Options:

1) Delivering the keynote speech to the staff training on Monday, August 8, at 2:00 p.m. The advantage of this time-slot is that you would probably be on the program with Chairman Leahy. The disadvantage is that I understand this is the same day as the Smokey the Bear celebration and the fire-fighter memorial ceremony.

(Firefighters memorial is scheduled from 1:00 - 2:00)

- 2) Performing anti-hunger or environmental community service in the District of Columbia along with the USDA employees on **Wednesday, August 10 between 1:30 - 4:40 p.m.** The advantage of this option is that it would reinforce your image as a Cabinet Secretary personally committed to public service. The disadvantage is that this event would probably take more time out of your schedule than the other options. *(NOTE: This is the same day as the clean water roundtable.)*
- 3) Either speaking to or attending a reception with the employees any time during the week -- day or evening -- that fits most conveniently into your schedule. The advantage of this option is that it will be easiest to fit into your schedule. The disadvantage of this option is that it might change the training schedule and thus add some additional cost.

Recommendation for Issue A:

I recommend option 3. Given the great number of issues on your agenda, I recommend you attend the training whenever is most convenient for you. Your presence at the training at any time will send a powerful message that you support AmeriCorps and appreciate the work of the rank-and-file employees across the country who are working hard on this unique new initiative to reinvent government. Other Cabinet Secretaries have already attended similar events.

Decision by the Secretary (Deputy Secretary) on Issue A:

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

Discuss with me _____

Date _____

Reviewed by _____

ISSUE B - Participating In the Fall Kick-Off of AmeriCorps

Background:

The President is scheduled to announce the start of the first full year of AmeriCorps service on **September 12th** in events around the country. The White House will strongly urge all Cabinet Secretaries to participate either by joining with the President or by visiting one of their Department's own AmeriCorps sites.

Immediately following that announcement, we will be starting a major internal communications campaign to explain AmeriCorps to all USDA employees. If you attend a kick-off ceremony in the patio, we can broadcast it by satellite to USDA employees and the media around the country.

Options:

1) In addition to the President's AmeriCorps kick-off, you would also attend an internal USDA kick-off event aimed at USDA employees and the media. The advantage of this option is that it would give you an highly effective platform to once again sell your message of change to both the general public and USDA employees. The disadvantage of this option its that it would require more of your time.

2) You would only attend an event associated with the President's kick-off on September 12th. The advantage of this option is that it would take the least amount of your time. The disadvantage of this option is that it would diminish your ability to communicate directly with USDA employees throughout the country.

Recommendation:

I recommend option 2. I recommend that you attend both the kick-off with the President and an internal USDA kick-off to be held in the patio and broadcast by satellite to field offices and media around the country. Such additional communication with USDA employees would be especially helpful given the strain caused by reorganization and downsizing and the likelihood that some USDA employees may be incorrectly worried that they will be replaced by AmeriCorps participants.

This is the same day as the regional awards here at USDA. Willie Nelson will be here.

Decision by the Secretary (Deputy Secretary) on Issue B:

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

Discuss with me _____

Date _____

Reviewed by _____



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August 3, 1994

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

THROUGH: Ali Webb *AW*
Director, Office of Communications

FROM: Joel Berg *JB*
Director of National Service, Office of Communications

SUBJECT: Welcoming Letter for AmeriCorps Training Conference

Background:

From Monday, August 8th through Friday, August 12th, approximately 200 people who will be managing USDA AmeriCorps projects will gather in the Washington area for training. Regardless of whether you are able to attend, it would be helpful if you would sign the attached welcoming letter that we would place in the front of our conference notebook.

Options:

- 1) Sign the attached letter.
- 2) Do not sign the attached letter.

Recommendation:

I recommend you sign the attached letter. The letter would send a strong message to USDA employees that you support AmeriCorps and that the program should be managed on a "Team USDA" basis, not an individual agency basis.

Decision by the Secretary:

Approve *✓*

Disapprove

Discuss with me

Date *8/8/94*

Reviewed by *Amz*

Dated?



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

August 8, 1994

Dear AmeriCorps/USDA Training Conference Participant:

Welcome to the first-ever training conference for the USDA AmeriCorps national service program.

I am excited that USDA is running such a large and ambitious AmeriCorps program. AmeriCorps will provide USDA with innovative and cost-effective approaches to meeting three of our main mission areas. With your help, we will develop creative approaches to decrease hunger and improve nutrition, enhance the economies and quality of life of rural communities, and clean-up our environment and protect our public lands.

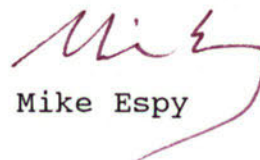
AmeriCorps will certainly help USDA "get things done."

All of you attending this conference are on the front lines of the "reinventing government" revolution. AmeriCorps is a unique new type of federal program that is locally-driven and focused on achieving concrete results. AmeriCorps transcends existing USDA agency lines and fits perfectly with our vision of a reorganized and reinvented USDA that better serves the American people.

Moreover, AmeriCorps has the potential to help transform America by rebuilding our sense of community, boosting individual opportunity, and promoting personal responsibility. It will help bridge social, racial, and regional gaps, allow more Americans to obtain post-secondary educations, and remind all citizens that they owe a debt of service to society. That is why AmeriCorps is such a high priority for both President Clinton and myself.

I thank you again for all your hard work on behalf of this challenging new initiative to create a "domestic Peace Corps." Together, we will once again make history.

Sincerely,


Mike Espy



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7/29/94

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE FmHA AND RDA ADMINISTRATORS

SUBJECT: Funding for FmHA/RDA AmeriCorps Participants

FROM: John Pentecost

ISSUES

Based on advice from Community Development OGC, legal authority for use of FY '94 program funds may restrict us from participating in AmeriCorps as planned. Housing and farm program funds identified to pay for the AmeriCorps participants is restricted to making grants and contracts for specifically legislated program activities.

Issue 1: We would have to actually contract or grant funds to a specific entity or entities to use the funds to pay for participants. While the Secretary has authorized sole-source contracts this first year, making such an arrangement on short notice, with only one or a limited number of groups, would be problematic if we are to meet the September 12 target date for having participants on board.

Issue 2: We are still limited to using the funds only for the purposes stated in the authorizing legislation. This is not a problem for the housing and farm outreach and assistance aspects proposed by FmHA. However, it would seriously jeopardize the rural development and EZ/EC concepts we are developing in partnership with RDA. RDA has set aside \$150,000 S&E money which is not sufficient to cover all of their 66 participants and which would have to be used by contract in order to remain available through 1995 (S&E funds lapse at the end of the fiscal year).

DISCUSSION

THESE ARE NOT NEW ISSUES. Budget and program staff have raised concerns about this since the programs were identified as potential funding sources. However, believing that the Secretary had fairly broad waiver capacity under the program and that the Corporation for National and Community Service would be the grant recipient, we kept pressing ahead on other aspects of implementing the program. We now know that the Corporation will not be an entity receiving the grant or contract and OGC has raised questions regarding the eligibility of any USDA generated entity for operating AmeriCorps. We are left with precious little time to choose and execute an alternative action.



Since we should use funds currently available if we are going to make a commitment to operate an AmeriCorps program during FY 95, two options are available:

- Contract or grant to a nonprofit organization (such as the Housing Assistance Council (HAC)) to run our program of housing outreach and, as appropriate, based on State Directors' target areas, contract with qualified farm groups for the farmer assistance program, or
- Seek a broad legislative "waiver" to use appropriated program funds in conjunction with the AmeriCorps effort.

DISCUSSION OF CONTRACT OPTION

Using HAC would solve our problem but leave RDA out of the AmeriCorps picture unless they come up with a similar approach with a program as flexible as the housing outreach and counseling program and find a national or regional group to run the program. Since they are having problems coming up with program or resources for this first year, this option would reduce to number of AmeriCorps participants either to 66 or to as many as our resources alone will carry and restrict the program to just housing and/or farm program-related activities.

RDA's S&E funds would permit them the flexibility to carry out the program for EZ/EC support as proposed, but restrict them to approximately 8 participants (@ \$20,000).

Potentially, HAC would agree to use the program to operate in the areas we have already designated, though they may have a philosophical and organization problem with using AmeriCorps to enhance FmHA's program delivery capability when their objective is to enhance their affiliated local nonprofit groups' capabilities. Issues such as who supervises the AmeriCorps participants would have to be settled, plus it may be necessary to amend the USDA application to cover the new concept.

We may be able to find a similar organization to run the farm program or, if not enough time is available to work it out within the next couple of weeks, just have the housing program this year and work through the farm program next year.

DISCUSSION OF LEGISLATION OPTION

Using the attachment as a voluntary legislative proposal, our OGC advises us that this could solve both the grant/contract and program use restriction issues. Both FmHA and RDA would be able to have their full programs and we could run them as a USDA effort as proposed.

The legislative amendment could basically be placed alone or with any bill under consideration, but has risks associated:

- Raises the question as to why isn't the money being used as required by the appropriation and authorization; if its available for AmeriCorps, couldn't it be used for more critical purposes?
(Only limited resources are available and the AmeriCorps approach is a viable alternative for achieving program objectives.)
- The provision looks like a blank check for all AmeriCorps activities, opens the door too wide and creates potential for abuse.
(We could narrow the language down or sell on fact that its is a n RCED "mission area" driven demonstration program, and limited only to AmeriCorps activities for a couple of years.)
- Getting such a provision passed would need political capital from Secretary, possibly the Corporation, and probably the White House; especially as it sets a precedent for other agencies.
(Secretary may support this provision as USDA is the biggest Federal actor serving diverse and high need areas. The Corporation may have bigger issues to support. The White House should support the Secretary.)
- Timing for such an amendment is bad; it's a rushed effort and could open the door to additional oversight by Congress on the AmeriCorps program (how indeed are these activities really being funded?).
(The question may boil down to degree Rural Development wants to and needs to maintain original concept; the HAC option would get us possibly 60 percent of our RCED objective.)

On the other hand, the precedent and authority may also give a real boost to the National and Community Service effort by creating a new way to "get things done."

RECOMMENDATION

Move forward with a voluntary legislative proposal since it would make the overall AmeriCorps effort by our Mission Area more viable. And open discussion with HAC or other group to see if we have sufficiently similar objectives to partnership for the Housing program.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, from the date of enactment until _____, 19____, the Secretary of Agriculture may transfer funds otherwise available so as to make such funds available in connection with activities in ~~cooperation with the Corporation for National and Community Service.~~ AmeriCorps

under the authority of the National and Community Service - ACT Trust Act.

TO: Hank Altman

FROM: Ron DeMumbrun, USDA
Dee DiFiore, USDA

SUBJECT: Vacant AmeriCorps Positions within the USDA Program

BACKGROUND: Several USDA AmeriCorps Project Managers have unfilled positions at this time. This is due to several reasons:

- Late program approval resulting in a lack of candidates.
- Budget problems within the Federal Government.
- Government furloughs.

For programs that are due to close at the end of September 96, these unfilled positions pose two problems:

1. Inability to accomplish program goals.
2. Inability for AmeriCorps Members to complete 1700 hours.

DISCUSSION:

Project managers could use part-time members, with a term-of-service of 900 hours, to fill these positions. However, there is approximately 1500 hours between now and September 30, 1996. This leaves a shortfall of 600 hours per member.

While we realize that 900 hours represents the minimum number of hours a part-time member must serve, we feel it would be unfair to ask a member to serve 1500 hours while receiving an educational award of a part-time member.

OPTIONS:

1. Use part-time members, with a term-of-service of 900 hours. These members would be terminated at the end of 900 hours of service.
2. Use part-time members, with a required term-of-service of 1500 hours.
3. Enroll part-time members but give the member the option of working more than the 900 hours, with the understanding they will only receive the educational award for part-time members.

4. Grant an exception to policy and allow members to be enrolled as full-time members and eligible to receive a pro-rated education award if the program closes before they can serve a full 1700 hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Our preferred option is number four. This would seem to be the best option for the members. It maximizes the time they can serve and does not penalize them for a situation beyond their control. It also meets program needs by maximizing the number of hours served.