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1981 ANNUAL REPORT

Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA)



VISTA

Volunteers in Service to America - VISTA has been in operation since 1964. The intent of the legislation establishing VISTA was to create a program to help the disadvantaged better cope with poverty-related problems.

Two categories of volunteers presently serve in VISTA, those recruited by ACTION directly- the Nationally Recruited Volunteers (NRV's), and those recruited locally within the community (LRV's). Both categories are retained to serve a year, subsidized at a level of from five-to-10 thousand dollars in federal funds, depending on the type of service and community involved. The question has been raised frequently as to whether the investment has been worth the results. It is known, for example, that 35 percent of those recruited have failed to complete even a year of service.

Within recent years VISTA has attracted controversy as a result of the political role of some of the organizations it has supported. The fact is that in the last administration, VISTA rapidly became a tax-supported tool in the hands of political activists. Organizations such as the Midwest Academy, the Citizens Labor Energy Coalition and ACORN received large grants.

Following the election of President Ronald Reagan, a profound rethinking of the place of the federal government in the life of the community took place. In ACTION, this process led to the re-evaluation of the VISTA program, its objectives and its practices. This critical review focused on the twin issues of voluntarism in the service of the community, and political activism disguised as service to the community. As a result, the decision was made to take steps to de-politicize VISTA as the short-term objective while measures would get underway aimed at an eventual complete phasing out of the program in FY '83.

The decision to take these steps was paralleled with the Director's determination to add emphasis to the recruitment of genuine volunteers in contrast to the paid volunteer service of VISTA. In line with this new philosophy at ACTION, the following steps were taken.

1. In the volunteer service area, recruitment of federally supported Nationally Recruited Volunteers was stopped. While this decision applies to a specific ACTION program only, it may, in the long run, have a profound effect on volunteer services in the United States.
2. In line with prohibition against organizing for political action by VISTA volunteers under existing contracts, VISTA has refused supplemental funding in every instance for the National Grants Program recipients. This program has been especially prone to flagrant abuses by political activist groups. There will be no new funding for this program.
3. For the remaining period of VISTA's operation, increased control and careful scrutiny will be carried out by the state, regional and national offices of ACTION with respect to all aspects of current and proposed projects.

FY '81 Operations

In FY '81 the number of VISTA projects decreased dramatically from 810 at the start of the fiscal year to 664 on September 30, 1981.

Among the more prominent areas of activities were: Community service projects accounting for 23 percent, housing was second with 19 percent, education and health accounting for 13 percent each, and energy conservation with 11 percent.

FY '81 VISTA Statistics

A. Number of VISTA volunteer service years:	4,208
1. Minorities (%):	
Black	27
Hispanic	8
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	2
Total:	39
2. Sex Ratio (%):	
Male	29
Female	71
3. Age (%):	
18 - 27 years	45
28 - 35	17
36 - 59	24
60 and over	14
B. Expenditures - FY '81	
Volunteer Support	\$23,671,000
Training:	1,045,000
Project Support	2,104,000
Grants	3,565,000
Evaluation	95,000
Total:	\$30,480,000
C. Number of VISTA standard projects:	642
D. Number of Regional Grants funded:	16
E. Number of National Grants funded:	6
Projects Total As of 9/30/81:	664