

Comments on RIN 1205-AB60

Submitted by Tony Sarmiento, Executive Director, Senior Service America, Inc.

January 24, 2011

Page 1

To: Mr. Thomas Dowd, Administrator  
Office of Policy Development and Research  
U.S. Department of Labor

From: Tony Sarmiento, Executive Director  
Senior Service America, Inc.

Re: RIN 1205-AB60, Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)  
Notice of Proposed Rulemaking: Additional Indicator on Volunteer Work

Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments about the proposed additional indicator for SCSEP related to volunteer work. As one of the national grantees awarded SCSEP funds by the Department of Labor, we prepared these comments after discussing the proposed indicator with a wide range of stakeholders and experts, including:

- our network of 81 local SCSEP subgrantees in 16 states;
- nonprofit and public agencies that host SCSEP participants in their community service assignments;
- leaders in the national and community service network, including Senior Corps and AmeriCorps;
- state and local providers of services to older adults; and
- researchers in gerontology, volunteering, and civic engagement.

In summary, we support the Department of Labor's effort to develop an additional indicator designed to complement the existing core performance indicators for SCSEP because we believe it could help improve the health and well-being of the low-income older adults who participate in SCSEP. We also support the Department's efforts—through this proposed measure as well as the SCSEP Final Rule approved in September 2010—to “provide balance to the employment focus of the existing performance measures” and “provide positive outcomes for participants who may not be employed but still build on the skills obtained in SCSEP,” as stated in the NPRM.

From our discussions with various stakeholders and experts, we found a high level of interest, receptivity, and qualified support for the proposed indicator. Nearly all agreed that linking SCSEP and volunteer work could produce multiple benefits not only to SCSEP participants but also many nonprofit and public agencies and the entire SCSEP program. But we also heard significant concerns about how “volunteer work” and the additional indicator were defined, and what data SCSEP grantees would be required to collect and report.

Based on these discussions and our decades of experience as a national SCSEP grantee, we offer the following general recommendations and specific recommended revisions in the wording of the proposed regulations.

## 1) General Recommendations

- a) **Define this additional indicator to parallel an existing additional indicator, “satisfaction of the participants, employers, and their host agencies with their experiences and the services provided” [641.710(b)(2)], rather than “parallel the existing core measure of entered employment” as stated in the NPRM.**

*Rationale:*

- i) It is consistent with the Department’s view in the NPRM that “Additional indicators are not subject to goal-setting and therefore are not subject to corrective action.”
  - ii) It would minimize the possibility of distracting grantees from achieving core performance measures such as the entered employment rate and service level.
  - iii) It would broaden the Department’s options to implement a simpler definition for the proposed indicator and reduce the potential data collection and reporting burden on grantees and others.
- b) **Develop a broader definition for the proposed additional indicator that includes continued participation as well as new entry into volunteer work by SCSEP participants.**

*Rationale:*

- i) It would be consistent with the Department’s view (stated in the preamble of the SCSEP Final Rule 641.535) that “grantees must have the flexibility to design an IEP that will lead to maximum self-sufficiency for the participant and an enhanced quality of life after participation in SCSEP has ended.”
  - ii) It would be supported by gerontological research indicating:
    - (1) the positive effects of sustained volunteer work on the health of the older volunteers themselves.
    - (2) that sustained volunteer work may be as important if not more important to the physical and psychological well-being of older adults as newly-initiated activity.
  - iii) It could simplify the related data collection and reporting requirements.
- c) **Explicitly include volunteer work performed for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons in faith-based as well as community-based organizations, charities, and public agencies.**

*Rationale:*

- i) It would be supported by research on racial, ethnic, linguistic, and class differences among older adults and volunteer work: specifically, that many low-income older adults from minority and/ other communities prefer to perform charity and other volunteer work through their religious institution or faith-based organization.

- ii) It would be consistent with the goals of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Corporation for National and Community Service's Faith-based and Community Initiatives.
- iii) It could expand the capacity and impact of faith-based organizations that serve families and communities in need without additional federal funding.

## 2) Specific Recommended Revisions in Wording.

We recommend the following deletions and substitute wording for the proposed regulation as stated in the NPRM. Recommended deletions are ~~struck out~~ and substitute wording is ***italicized/bolded/underlined***.

Sec. 641.14 What definitions apply to this part?

\* \* \* \* \*

Additional indicators mean retention in unsubsidized employment for 1 year; satisfaction of participants, employers and their host agencies with their experiences and the services provided; ~~entry into~~ ***new or continued participation in*** volunteer work; and any other indicators of performance that the Secretary determines to be appropriate to evaluate services and performance. (OAA section 513(b)(2)).

\* \* \* \* \*

Volunteer work means activities or work that former participants perform for a public agency of a State, local government or intergovernmental agency or for a charity or similar non-profit ***or faith-based*** organization, for civic, charitable, or for humanitarian reasons, and without expectation of compensation. Volunteer work does not include work a former participant performs that is similar or identical to work the former participant performed for compensation for the organization.

\* \* \* \* \*

3. Section 641.700 is amended by adding paragraph (c)(4) to read as follows:

Sec. 641.700 What performance measures/indicators apply to SCSEP grantees?

\* \* \* \* \*

(c) \* \* \*

(4) The Secretary has designated ~~entry into~~ ***new or continued participation in*** volunteer work as an additional indicator.

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January 24, 2011

Page 4

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4. Section Sec. 641.710 is amended by adding paragraph (b)(3) to read as follows:

Sec. 641.710 How are the performance indicators defined?

\* \* \* \* \*

(b) \* \* \*

(3) ~~“Entry into~~ **New or continued participation in** volunteer work” is defined by the formula: ~~Of those not engaged in volunteer work at the time of entry into the SCSEP, the number of participants who perform volunteer work in the first quarter after the exit quarter, divided by the number of participants who exit during the quarter~~ **as the number of participants who start or continue participation in volunteer work after exit. The Department will prescribe the data to be collected and develop procedures for collecting and reporting such data that minimize the burden on grantees and volunteer programs.**

*Additional Note.*

*For comparison, below is the definition of one of the existing “additional indicators” [from 641.710(b) of the SCSEP Final Rule enacted Sept. 2010]:*

*(2) “Satisfaction of the participants, employers, and their host agencies with their experiences and the services provided” is defined as the results of customer satisfaction surveys administered to each of these three customer groups. The Department will prescribe the content of the surveys.*

If you wish any additional information or explanation of our analysis or recommendations, please contact me.