

What is the Kennedy Act, And What Can it Do for Me?

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In the midst of the largest recession in decades, you've probably heard about the Stimulus Bill in one capacity or another. But did you know that, upon its implementation, it did little to directly support non-profit organizations?

That's where the Kennedy Act comes in. *Michael R. Murphy* is an attorney in the Government Relations practice of Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP. He's guest blogging for C2C about the Kennedy Serve America Act, and about the specific volunteer and award opportunities it offers for students, seniors, veterans, and more.

Manpower Stimulus for Non-Profits

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Despite a request to President Obama and Congressional leaders from numerous non-profit coalitions, The 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (the "Stimulus Bill") provided very little direct support to non-profit organizations. For non-profits, most of the funding in the Stimulus Bill was restricted by such things as formula-based block grants or the necessity of forming partnerships with other local programs. In effect, the Stimulus Bill did little for the majority of non-profit organizations. However, the failure of the Stimulus Bill to help non-profits was answered by the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (H.R. 1388) (the "Act").

Understanding the non-profit sector's role in the economic recovery of our nation, President Obama called on Congress to create new volunteer and service opportunities and Congress answered that call. The push to pass legislation was driven, in part, by the declining health, due to brain cancer, of its sponsor and later namesake of the Act, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) (1962-2009). Senator Kennedy was a longtime champion of volunteer service who, before passing away, was able to cast a vote for the Act on the Senate floor. Congress later renamed the Act in his honor.

Amongst other things the Act creates new service opportunities and rewards Americans for their service. The Act creates opportunities for Americans of all ages to volunteer and serve in order to build a stronger nation by being part of the solution to the many challenges that we face including the challenges of education, health care, energy, poverty and much more. The bill is designed to triple the number of Americans participating in national volunteer service programs. The bill authorizes \$5.7 billion over five years, however, much of this depends on how much funding actually gets appropriated.

The Act plans to increase the number of volunteer opportunities for Americans of all ages from 75,000 to 250,000. Further, the Act increases the full-time education award that service members receive from \$4,725 to \$5,350 and ties the award to the maximum Pell grant moving

forward. The expansion of specific opportunities for certain groups of Americans are listed below:

Middle and High School Students

The Act creates the Summer of Service Program which will engage middle and high school students to participate in volunteer activities in their communities by offering a \$500 education award which can be used towards getting a college education. Students are eligible to participate in a maximum of two terms of service to earn up to \$1,000 in education awards.

The Act also establishes new Youth Engagement Zones, which are service learning programs, especially in low-income areas, that will allow high school students as well as out-of-school youth the ability to participate in volunteer efforts that address challenges in their communities. Further, the program encourages local organizations and schools to form partnerships to provide students with real world activities.

College Students

The Act expands opportunities for college students to volunteer as well as creates the Campuses of Service program that supports and recognizes institutions of higher education with exemplary service-learning programs and those that assist students in the pursuit of public service careers.

Seniors

The Act will expand the existing Senior Corps program which is a volunteer program for people over the age of 55. Seniors will be allowed to transfer the education awards they receive through their service to a child or grandchild to use towards college.

The Act also creates Silver Scholarships and Encore Fellowships which provide opportunities for seniors to transition into service after retirement. Silver Scholars will have the ability to earn up to \$1,000 in exchange for 350 hours of service.

Veterans

The Act creates a Veteran's Corps designed to allow veteran's to help their fellow servicemen and women. This new Corps will function similarly to Americorps and Senior Corps in order to support programs that help veterans.

Disabled Youth

The Act expands opportunities for disabled youth, by doubling the resources available, to become more involved with volunteer service.

Native Americans

The Act creates a new office and expanded volunteer opportunities for Native Americans.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Act creates a Community Solutions Fund pilot program that awards matching grants to social entrepreneur venture funds, the Act does not offer much in the way of cash incentives to non-profits. Rather, it expands national service programs and creates new ones to expand the number of volunteers available to non-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations are being threatened by job losses due to shrinking revenues while also facing an increased demand for services. The Act will provide a critical workforce to deal with the need during these challenging economic times.