

**Statement of  
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**AoA-Convened Listening Forum  
On Reauthorizing the Older Americans Act  
Alexandria, Virginia  
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Thank you, Assistant Secretary Greenlee, for convening these listening forums, and special thanks for inviting comments about Title V and the Senior Community Service Employment Program.

The U.S. Department of Labor has awarded Senior Service America a national SCSEP grant every year since 1968. We operate our program in 16 states through 81 local subgrantees, including 20 area agencies on aging. The majority of the counties our subgrantees serve are defined as rural.

At this early stage in the reauthorization process, I would like to offer three suggestions for the Administration on Aging to consider regarding Title V:

1. Reaffirm SCSEP as an aging program.
2. Change the meaning of community service and elevate its status under Title V.
3. Through SCSEP, prepare low-income disadvantaged adults to become advocates and agents of change.

First, let's embrace SCSEP as an aging program. Especially during our current period of high unemployment, let's reject a view of SCSEP as strictly a jobs and training program. This may appear counterintuitive, especially considering that more than one-fourth of the 46 million hours worked each year by 100,000 SCSEP participants are performed in agencies and programs in the aging services network. In independent national surveys conducted on behalf of the Department of Labor, two-thirds of these agencies report that SCSEP participants increased their ability to provide services.

But SCSEP has more than one mission, just as senior nutrition programs do more than reduce hunger and food insecurity. Like nutrition programs, SCSEP promotes the socialization and well-being of older individuals. It improves the health as well as economic security of thousands of vulnerable older adults by providing them with meaningful work. SCSEP requires a person-centered approach to identify what is meaningful to each participant – an approach that closely aligns SCSEP with other titles of the Older Americans Act.

Adopting this view of SCSEP can help guide us as we consider revisions to the law. SCSEP performance measures, which currently contain only labor-market outcomes, will require particular attention. Let's use the latest gerontological research to propose complementary outcomes for SCSEP that focus on health and self-efficacy. What gets measured is what gets done.

Second, let's change the meaning of community service and elevate its status under Title V. How can Title V create new types of jobs so SCSEP participants can help address unmet community needs? For example, using additional funds from the Recovery Act, Senior Service America launched a new Digital Inclusion Initiative to bridge the digital divide among older Americans. Sixty of our local subgrantees hired 140 new SCSEP participants to coach other older adults to use the Internet at more than 100 public access sites, including libraries and senior centers. Since November, our SCSEP-paid coaches have helped more than 3,000 older adults (including some in their 90s) use the Internet for the first time. Our initiative is reaching those older adults overlooked and underserved by the existing public training providers and private vendors of computer instruction.

Let's consider revisions to Title V to include incentives for developing additional innovative and expanded community service roles for older adults eligible for SCSEP. Too many times, these individuals are undervalued not only because of their age, but also due to their race, gender or education.

Finally, let's explore how SCSEP can prepare low-income, disadvantaged older adults to advocate on their own behalf and become agents of change. How might Title V be revised to better advance and support the advocacy goals embedded in other titles of the Older Americans Act? We should also explore ways to build partnerships between SCSEP and the programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service. SCSEP began during the War on Poverty; let's revisit its original vision and mission.

For more than four decades, SCSEP has done a good job of serving older adults and the aging network. But SCSEP – along with all programs under the Older Americans Act – will need to move from good to great to meet the challenges and opportunities of our aging nation.

We will continue to explore possible refinements and improvements to Title V with our subgrantees and others, and will share them with AoA.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in today's forum.