

AmeriCorps Disallowed Hours for Prohibited Lobbying Activity

Closed 03/20/2024

The AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General (AmeriCorps OIG) investigated an allegation that College Possible staff and an AmeriCorps member were lobbying at the state capitol in Olympia, WA. AmeriCorps OIG's investigation substantiated the allegation, and confirmed that only one member was in attendance and the lobbying activity was limited to one day. AmeriCorps OIG referred the matter to AmeriCorps State and National (ASN) and recommended it disallow the member's service hours and a staff member's hours that had been charged as matching expenditures for the date of the lobbying activity. AmeriCorps OIG also recommended that ASN provide additional training to College Possible on prohibited activities.

Agency/Administrative Actions

ASN responded that it had directed state service commission Serve Washington to take OIG's recommended actions. Serve Washington stated that additional training would be covered during its quarterly subgrantee meeting on January 26th with all Washington programs, and individually with College Possible on January 10th by the assigned Program Officer.

With respect to OIG's recommendation to disallow hours, College Possible contended that the 15-minute visits with Washington state legislators the members participated in did not attempt to influence legislation. ASN reviewed the plain language communicated by the program on social media and the member's own description of the purpose of the visit and decided that a reasonable person would interpret those as communicating an intent to engage in lobbying. Therefore, ASN instructed Serve Washington to instruct College Possible to disallow the relevant hours.

Case ID 2023-048