

AmeriCorps Issued Debt to Recover Costs Associated with Volunteer Stipends and Non-compliant National Service Criminal History Checks

Closed 12/02/2024

The AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General (AmeriCorps OIG) investigated allegations that the City of Oakland, Office on Aging (City of Oakland) paid Senior Companion Program (SCP) and Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) volunteers full stipends when volunteers either did not serve or document the hours claimed following the end of AmeriCorps' authorization for grantees to pay volunteers a temporary allowance due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evidence collected through the investigation supported findings that the City of Oakland violated AmeriCorps' General Terms and Conditions and submitted false claims to AmeriCorps through its Federal Financial Reports when it continued to pay the SCP and FGP volunteers a full stipend for unsupported hours after AmeriCorps ended its temporary COVID-19 allowance on September 20, 2021. The City of Oakland continued paying its volunteers full stipends through December 2022 but was unable to provide documentation supporting \$136,776 worth of hours served. The investigation further found that the City of Oakland was unable to provide documentation supporting \$426,249 in volunteer stipends for the periods of May 2019 to December 2019 and February 2020 to December 2021. Evidence collected also supported a finding that the City of Oakland maintained insufficient National Service Criminal History Checks (NSCHCs) for 38 SCP and FGP volunteers, a violation of Federal regulations and a significant safety issue.

AmeriCorps OIG recommended that AmeriCorps disallow \$563,025 in costs associated with stipend payments to volunteers and an additional \$33,510 for the non-compliant NSCHCs. AmeriCorps OIG also recommended that AmeriCorps determine whether the City of Oakland has appropriate oversight of its AmeriCorps programs, and whether additional administrative actions should be taken against the City of Oakland.

Agency/Administrative Actions

AmeriCorps concurred with the OIG's recommendations. It initiated recoupment actions against the City of Oakland in the form of a Debt Collection Notice for \$596,535 in grant funds. Further, AmeriCorps' Office of the Chief Risk Officer determined the City of Oakland does not have appropriate oversight of its SCP and FGP programs and should improve its record keeping procedures. AmeriCorps is also requiring the City of Oakland to take additional actions, including certifying the completion of all required trainings for program staff, volunteers, and volunteer stations, and developing policy that outlines the roles and responsibilities for the completion of required grant reports.

Case ID 2023-030