

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4196

To amend the National and Community Service Act of 1990 to establish an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding within the Corporation for National and Community Service, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 18, 2024

Mr. COONS (for himself and Mr. YOUNG) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To amend the National and Community Service Act of 1990 to establish an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding within the Corporation for National and Community Service, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Building Civic Bridges
5 Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING.**

2 Subtitle H of title I of the National and Community
3 Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12653 et seq.) is amended
4 by adding at the end the following:

5 **“PART VI—CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING**

6 **“SEC. 198T. OFFICE OF CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING.**

7 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There shall be in the Cor-
8 poration an Office of Civic Bridgebuilding (in this section
9 referred to as the ‘Office’). The Office shall be headed by
10 an Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding, who shall be designated
11 by the Chief Executive Officer pursuant to section 195(b).

12 “(b) DUTIES.—The Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding
13 shall carry out each of the following:

14 “(1) Administer the grant program described in
15 subsection (d) to support civic bridgebuilding across
16 the United States, including by establishing stand-
17 ardized criteria (based on principles of scientific re-
18 search and input through the consultation process
19 under subsection (c)) to track the effectiveness of
20 projects and activities funded under such program.

21 “(2) Support the Corporation in providing
22 training in skills and techniques relevant to civic
23 bridgebuilding (based on principles of scientific re-
24 search and input through the consultation process
25 under subsection (c))—

1 “(A) for participants (including individuals
2 who have been selected to be participants) of a
3 program receiving funding under the authority
4 of the national service laws; and

5 “(B) upon request by an organization that
6 receives funding under the authority of the na-
7 tional service laws or that is carrying out a pro-
8 gram in which participants described in sub-
9 paragraph (A) are participating, for such orga-
10 nization.

11 “(3) Support research and evaluations on civic
12 bridgebuilding and the dissemination of related in-
13 formation, including through—

14 “(A) evaluation and oversight of the grant
15 program described in subsection (d);

16 “(B) as the Corporation determines nec-
17 essary, collaboration (including through the
18 evaluation of the activities of the Corporation
19 relating to civic bridgebuilding and civic en-
20 gagement) between the Office and—

21 “(i) other offices (such as the Office
22 of Research and Evaluation), teams, or in-
23 dividuals within the Corporation; and

24 “(ii) other Federal agencies, including
25 the Community Relations Service of the

1 Department of Justice, the United States
2 Agency for International Development, and
3 the United States Institute of Peace; and
4 “(C) the establishment of a publicly avail-
5 able collection of publications for a research
6 base for the purpose of assembling research fo-
7 cused on evaluating the extent to which civic
8 bridgebuilding and civic engagement activities
9 strengthen or weaken other civic bridgebuilding
10 and civic engagement activities and outcomes in
11 the United States.

12 “(4) Activate and sustain a public conversation
13 about the importance of civic bridgebuilding by con-
14 vening and coordinating civic bridgebuilding pro-
15 grams and providing resources, networking, and col-
16 laboration opportunities to individuals and entities in
17 the civic bridgebuilding field for the purpose of dis-
18 seminating and refining best practices based on
19 principles of scientific research and input through
20 the consultation process under subsection (c).

21 “(c) CONSULTATION PROCESS.—

22 “(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the duties
23 under this section, the Officer of Civic
24 Bridgebuilding shall consult with members of the
25 civic bridgebuilding field, including for purposes of—

1 “(A) identifying strategic priorities for the
2 Office;

3 “(B) developing the standardized criteria
4 required under subsection (b)(1);

5 “(C) supporting the development and dis-
6 semination of research under subsection (b)(3);

7 “(D) developing best practices for civic
8 bridgebuilding under subsection (b)(4); and

9 “(E) administering the grant program de-
10 scribed in subsection (d).

11 “(2) DIVERSITY IN CONSULTATION.—In car-
12 rying out the consultation under paragraph (1), the
13 Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding shall consult mem-
14 bers of the civic bridgebuilding field who represent
15 diverse ideological, religious, racial, regional, profes-
16 sional, or ethnic communities, including such mem-
17 bers—

18 “(A) who represent eligible entities en-
19 gaged in civic bridgebuilding;

20 “(B) who represent existing or potential
21 programs and grantees receiving funding under
22 the authority of the national service laws, in-
23 cluding State Service Commissions;

24 “(C) who are researchers producing work
25 based on principles of scientific research related

1 to civic bridgebuilding in the United States and
 2 internationally; and

3 “(D) who represent other Federal agencies
 4 or public institutions engaged in or supporting
 5 work related to civic bridgebuilding in the
 6 United States and internationally, such as—

7 “(i) the Community Relations Service
 8 of the Department of Justice;

9 “(ii) the United States Agency for
 10 International Development; and

11 “(iii) the United States Institute of
 12 Peace.

13 “(d) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING PILOT GRANT PRO-
 14 GRAM.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—From the amounts appro-
 16 priated to carry out this subsection, the Corporation
 17 (acting through the Officer of Civic Bridgebuilding
 18 with input through the consultation process under
 19 subsection (c))—

20 “(A) shall carry out a pilot program for a
 21 3-year period to award grants, on a competitive
 22 basis, to eligible entities to support civic
 23 bridgebuilding programs across the United
 24 States for purposes of—

1 “(i) reducing conflict and improving
2 social cohesion; and

3 “(ii) addressing a public concern such
4 as unmet human, educational, health care,
5 environmental, or public safety needs; and

6 “(B) may carry out such a pilot program
7 for additional 3-year periods.

8 “(2) GRANT PERIOD.—A grant awarded under
9 this subsection shall be for a 1-year period. Grants
10 shall be awarded under this subsection in 3 grant
11 cycles for each 3-year period of the pilot program
12 carried out under paragraph (1).

13 “(3) APPLICATION.—To be eligible to receive a
14 grant under this subsection, an eligible entity shall
15 submit an application to the Corporation at such
16 time, in such manner, and containing such informa-
17 tion and assurances as the Corporation may require,
18 including—

19 “(A) a description of the project that will
20 be funded with the grant;

21 “(B) an explanation of how that such
22 project will—

23 “(i) engage communities across lines
24 of polarization;

1 “(ii) facilitate the establishment or
2 continuation of civic bridgebuilding and so-
3 cial cohesion, which may include address-
4 ing the root causes of polarization and con-
5 flict as described in the publicly available
6 collection of publications for a research
7 base established under subsection
8 (b)(3)(C);

9 “(iii) reflect research supporting the
10 efficacy and impact of the proposed ap-
11 proach for the project; and

12 “(iv) ensure physical, social, and psy-
13 chological wellbeing and safety for all par-
14 ticipants involved in the project, including
15 for such participants from historically
16 marginalized communities;

17 “(C) a description of best practices
18 grounded in principles of scientific research for
19 how such safety will be achieved; and

20 “(D) an assurance that the eligible entity
21 will report outcomes of such project to track ef-
22 fectiveness based on standardized criteria estab-
23 lished by the Office of Civic Bridgebuilding
24 under subsection (b)(1).

1 “(4) USES OF FUNDS.—An eligible entity re-
 2 ceiving a grant under this subsection shall use the
 3 grant funds to carry out a project to advance civic
 4 bridgebuilding in communities across the United
 5 States.

6 “(e) COMPTROLLER GENERAL.—The Comptroller
 7 General of the United States shall, not later than 18
 8 months after the end of the 3-year period of the program
 9 carried out under subsection (d)(1)(A) and, as applicable,
 10 not later than 18 months after each 3-year period of the
 11 program carried out under subsection (d)(1)(B), submit
 12 to Congress a report, which summarizes and assesses the
 13 effectiveness and impact of the activities carried out under
 14 grants awarded under subsection (d).

15 “(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

16 “(1) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING.—The term ‘civic
 17 bridgebuilding’—

18 “(A) means an activity, grounded in prin-
 19 ciples of scientific research, that—

20 “(i) fosters respect between diverse
 21 communities;

22 “(ii) supports social cohesion and di-
 23 minishes polarization;

24 “(iii) forges a sense of common civic
 25 purpose; and

1 “(iv) seeks to address a public con-
2 cern such as unmet human, educational,
3 health care, environmental, or public safety
4 needs; and

5 “(B) includes—

6 “(i) activities that take place in local
7 communities, where individuals and insti-
8 tutions come together to build empathy
9 and social cohesion, strengthen belonging,
10 and address local issues; and

11 “(ii) activities at the field level, where
12 civic bridgebuilding leaders work together
13 to share research and best practices, learn
14 from one another, and grow other civic
15 bridgebuilding.

16 “(2) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING FIELD.—The term
17 ‘civic bridgebuilding field’ means—

18 “(A) the programs, leaders, and commu-
19 nity groups involved in civic bridgebuilding ac-
20 tivities;

21 “(B) researchers producing work based on
22 principles of scientific research related to civic
23 bridgebuilding in the United States and abroad;
24 and

1 “(C) Federal agencies and public institu-
2 tions engaged in or supporting work related to
3 civic bridgebuilding in the United States and
4 internationally.

5 “(3) CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING LEADER.—The
6 term ‘civic bridgebuilding leader’ means an indi-
7 vidual who leads civic bridgebuilding programs or ef-
8 forts.

9 “(4) CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.—The term ‘civic en-
10 gagement’ means an individual or collective action
11 designed to address a public concern such as an
12 unmet human, educational, health care, environ-
13 mental, or public safety need.

14 “(5) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term ‘eligible en-
15 tity’ means a nonprofit entity, community- or faith-
16 based organization, institution of higher education
17 (as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Edu-
18 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a))), public in-
19 stitution, or consortium of any such entities.

20 “(6) PUBLIC INSTITUTION.—The term ‘public
21 institution’ means a library or unit of State, local,
22 or special purpose government.

23 “(7) RESEARCH BASE.—The term ‘research
24 base’ means any publications that contain observa-
25 tions, analysis, and conclusions based on principles

1 of scientific research with respect to the challenges
 2 of political and social polarization in the United
 3 States, and practical approaches to strengthen social
 4 cohesion, foster a sense of national connection, or
 5 improve intergroup relations in divided communities.

6 “(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
 7 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
 8 \$15,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2027.”.

9 **SEC. 3. TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

10 The table of contents in section 1(b) of the National
 11 and Community Service Act of 1990 is amended by insert-
 12 ing at the end of the item relating to subtitle H of title
 13 I, the following:

“PART VI—CIVIC BRIDGEBUILDING

“Sec. 198T. Office of Civic Bridgebuilding.”.

