



Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** ★★ ★

Branding and Messaging Guidance

Requirements and Recommendations for AmeriCorps Grantees



July 2015

Dear AmeriCorps Grantees,

In the spirit of coordination and collaboration, it is our pleasure to share the AmeriCorps Branding and Messaging Guidance.

Whether you are a new grantee or a longstanding member of our community, this resource will enable all of us to tell the most effective, compelling story of how AmeriCorps members get things done.

The “A” is more than a logo or a bullet point on a branding checklist; it is a symbol of our nation’s tradition of citizens from all walks of life coming together to solve their community’s greatest challenges. Every one of the 75,000 AmeriCorps members who will serve at one of 25,000 sites this year is part of this legacy. Elected officials have said the presence of the “A” represents hope to individuals and communities coping with a variety of challenges. The “A” says someone cares.

For some, seeing the “A” evokes that memory of how AmeriCorps members helped their community recover from a disaster. For others, the “A” may remind them of the AmeriCorps members who helped tutor them in school or of a relative who served and then used her education award to pay for college. For the nearly one million Americans who have served in AmeriCorps, the “A” inspires the strong sense of pride that comes from being part of something larger than themselves.

Working together, we can also ensure partners in the nonprofit or faith-based communities, elected officials at all levels of government, and corporate or philanthropic leaders consistently see the “A.” Each time they see the word AmeriCorps, they will be reminded of how we are an innovative, cost-effective strategy tackling the country’s biggest challenges.

Whether you are leading a State Service Commission or administering a national or local AmeriCorps program, the same principles apply. The entire AmeriCorps community becomes stronger if we all adhere to these branding and public engagement practices.

If you have questions, please contact our Office of External Affairs at digitalmedia@cns.gov.

Warmest Regards,



Ted Miller, Chief of External Affairs



Bill Basl, Director of AmeriCorps

Overview

The AmeriCorps brand reminds individuals of programs that work, and the funding organization that helps make them work for more people in communities across the country. Consistent branding and messaging gives people the opportunity to share a connection with the program's impact. Strong branding equals visibility, which elevates the work of AmeriCorps grantees and members. Further, we strategically brand and message the efforts of our programs to help establish and reinforce an emotional connection to AmeriCorps and the impact of our grantees and their members.

Over time, consistent management of brand establishes a reputation that can promote the work of AmeriCorps and support long-term sustainability and growth.

The Four 'R's of Branding

- **Reasons**

It is important that we brand all AmeriCorps-funded programs so that we can call attention to the innovative work you are doing in communities across the country. These materials can be used to showcase your community impact.

- **Requirements**

Branding AmeriCorps is fundamental, basic, essential, and required. AmeriCorps grantees are required to verify that all digital properties, media materials, and other relevant items reflect their association with AmeriCorps. The beginning of the program year (or grant cycle) is a great time to inventory your properties and materials to ensure that they appropriately reflect your national service affiliation.

- **Resources**

CNCS offers an array of AmeriCorps and CNCS branding resources – electronic and hard copy – that are available on our website. Read more about these resources and find web links on the following pages.

- **Recommendations**

Examples of branding and messaging strategies are provided in this document including tips for AmeriCorps members and alums as they learn to tell the story of their service. Also, a quick branding and messaging checklist is provided for programs that can be customized per commission and/or grantee.



Reasons to Brand AmeriCorps

Branding AmeriCorps conveys to individuals, communities, and the nation what we stand for, our value, our character, our national movement of service. It is our voice and our strategy to demonstrate AmeriCorps uniformity, quality, credibility, and experience.

Branding success requires a national service culture movement strategy – grantee by grantee, member by member. According to Forbes (2012), “In a movement strategy, brands have a purpose that people can get behind. Brands can inspire millions of people to join a community. Brands can rally people for or against something... Brands can activate a passionate group of people to do something like changing the world.”

When Congress created AmeriCorps in 1993, the Committee that wrote our legislation gave this guidance: “The Committee believes that national service must have a national identity. The program can become a lasting American institution only if the benefits of national service for communities and participants are made clear to the general public. The Committee expects the Corporation to ensure that a national program identity is clearly established.”

There are many programmatic and strategic reasons to brand AmeriCorps:

- **Sustainability:** Affiliating with AmeriCorps provides a "seal of approval" to help programs generate private resources and achieve their match, stretching the return on federal investment.
- **Esprit de corps:** Knowing that you are part of a large national movement and not just a small local project has positive impacts on morale, productivity, teamwork, and continuing service.
- **Recruitment:** Maintaining a diverse high-quality applicant pool to fill AmeriCorps 75,000+ annual slots requires continual promotion of AmeriCorps opportunities.
- **Lifelong Service:** Building a successful AmeriCorps alumni movement won't be possible unless AmeriCorps members understand what AmeriCorps is and how they are part of it.

Branding is our opportunity to create something with lasting impact. It is how we tell our story of service and community impact; and it is absolutely key to our success.



Requirements of AmeriCorps Programs

As an AmeriCorps grantee, you are required to verify that all digital properties, media materials, and other relevant items reflect your association with AmeriCorps. The beginning of the program year (or grant cycle) is a great time to inventory your properties and materials to ensure that they appropriately reflect your national service affiliation. Here are prime examples of how to execute AmeriCorps branding:

- Prominently display the standard AmeriCorps logo on websites, most notably on the home page and “About Us” sections.
- Use standardized language to describe the program in press releases and other public documents to identify the organization’s AmeriCorps affiliation.
- Include appropriate AmeriCorps logo on all gear for AmeriCorps-funded programs
- Display signs or posters that feature the grantee and the AmeriCorps logo at all sites where AmeriCorps members are serving, especially those to which elected officials or private-sector partners are invited to visit.

Be Compliant!

CNCS’s comprehensive engagement plan provides ideal opportunities to ensure that every audience with which we connect knows that their community is benefiting from national service. This is also the moment to ensure all grantees are following the branding requirements.

Make sure public education and outreach meets branding and messaging standards. AmeriCorps grantees are required to use approved AmeriCorps branding and messaging language.

Our grantees operate in thousands of locations across the United States. Consistently showing your organization’s connection to AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service ensures that our shared message and visuals (e.g., logos, banners) reinforce the emotional connection to AmeriCorps, so that community members feel invested in our work.



The 2015 Terms and Conditions for AmeriCorps State and National Grants outline the following requirements related to branding and messaging:

- **Identification as an AmeriCorps Program or Member.** The recipient shall identify the program as an AmeriCorps program and members as AmeriCorps members. All agreements with subrecipients, operating sites, or service locations, related to the AmeriCorps program must explicitly state that the program is an AmeriCorps program and AmeriCorps members are the resource being provided.
- **The AmeriCorps Name and Logo.** AmeriCorps is a registered service mark of CNCS. CNCS provides a camera-ready logo. All recipient and subrecipient websites shall clearly state that they are an AmeriCorps recipient and shall prominently display the AmeriCorps logo. Recipients and subrecipients shall use the AmeriCorps name and logo on service gear and public materials such as stationery, application forms, recruitment brochures, on-line position postings or other recruitment materials, orientation materials, member curriculum materials, signs, banners, press releases and publications related to their AmeriCorps program in accordance with CNCS requirements.
- To publicize the relationship between the program and AmeriCorps, the recipient shall describe their program as “an AmeriCorps program.” Recipients shall provide information or training to their AmeriCorps members about how their program is part of the national AmeriCorps program and about the other national service programs of CNCS. Recipients are strongly encouraged to place signs that include the AmeriCorps name and logo at their service sites and may use the slogan “AmeriCorps Serving Here.” AmeriCorps members should state that they are AmeriCorps members during public speaking opportunities.
- The recipient may not alter the AmeriCorps logo, and must obtain written permission from CNCS before using the AmeriCorps name or logo on materials that will be sold, or permitting donors to use the AmeriCorps name or logo in promotional materials. The recipient may not use or display the AmeriCorps name or logo in connection with any activity prohibited by statute, regulation, or CNCS General Terms and Conditions, and specific award terms and conditions.

Resources & Recommendations for Branding AmeriCorps Programs

CNCS and AmeriCorps branding resources are available to all AmeriCorps grantees on our website. Camera-ready AmeriCorps and CNCS logos and other branded materials can be downloaded at NationalService.gov/Logos.

Electronic CNCS branded materials are available for your use and include logos, website banners, fact sheet template, press release template, and more! CNCS also offers **free “hard copy” public outreach and education resources** such as posters, business cards, bookmarks and stickers.

Go to pubs.nationalservice.gov or look under the “Public outreach and education resources” area of nationalservice.gov to order free national service materials. Send an email to pressoffice@cns.gov with any questions.

Following is a quick list of resources and how best to use them for your program.

Logo

CNCS has an AmeriCorps program logo that you should use to correctly brand any newsletters, signage, and collateral that you create for your program. The logo should appear in any collateral related to your grant.



Website Reference

Mentions of your organization’s connection to AmeriCorps should be prominently displayed on your website. Use the AmeriCorps logo, the AmeriCorps web banner, and your program narrative. This helps to further brand your connection to AmeriCorps and provides added credibility to your organization.

Press Releases

Our press release template will help you pitch your local media about your program receiving the AmeriCorps grant. It includes all the basic information you need about AmeriCorps and CNCS. All of your press releases should directly reference AmeriCorps. When you plan press engagement or make pitches, please notify pressoffice@cns.gov.

Social Media

When using social media channels to amplify your work related to your AmeriCorps grant, be sure to use **#AmeriCorps**. Include photos and videos to further draw attention to your impact.

Gear

Order a wide variety of AmeriCorps-branded shirts, pins, patches, and more at nationalservicegear.org!

Social Media

When using social media channels to amplify your work related to your AmeriCorps grant, be sure to use **#AmeriCorps**. Include photos and videos to further draw attention to your impact, and tag our accounts:

 **Twitter**
 @AmeriCorps
 @NationalService

 **Facebook**
 Facebook.com/AmeriCorps
 Facebook.com/NationalService

Photography

Showcase AmeriCorps by using powerful photos that convey impact, branding (“Display the A!”), and are easy to understand. All photos taken of your program should include the intended impact your program has related to your AmeriCorps grant.



Use your photos to tell your story online by connecting with social media sites as described here.

Co-Branding

Your organization does great work! And AmeriCorps helps make it happen! Displaying our brands side-by-side reinforces our partnership, and ties your work into the nationwide narrative of powerful service.



Visits from Elected Officials and Corporate Partners

When you have visits to your AmeriCorps-funded program from elected officials, corporate partners, and other key constituencies, be sure that the program is well-branded with the AmeriCorps logo prominently displayed in key locations and that staff, volunteers, and program participants are prepared to talk about the impact of your program from their perspectives.

 **Tumblr**
 NationalService.tumblr.com

 **Instagram**
 Instagram.com/NationalService

The “Elevator Speech”

AmeriCorps grantee staff and members should be prepared to quickly and simply describe their AmeriCorps experience. An “Elevator Speech” is the idea is that they prepare a summary that they could deliver in 30 seconds – the time it would take to spark interest during a chance meeting in an elevator. Here’s a straightforward structure to follow:

My name is [NAME] and I’m an AmeriCorps member serving with [ORGANIZATION]. For the next year, I will be doing [TYPE OF SERVICE] while working to [TANGIBLE OUTCOME] in [LOCATION].

This is the initial 15-30 second introduction, which touches all the most crucial information in two sentences. Encourage your staff and members to start here before going deeper into program specifics – which will come naturally in further discussion.

Sharing a Member’s Story

Support AmeriCorps members and Alums in learning to tell their story. Here are tips for members and alums:

- Begin with the elevator speech. *(This helps to set the tone of service.)*
- Share what led you to serve. *(Here is an opportunity to share what inspires you to serve.)*
- Share the impact of your service on the community. *(You can do this through sharing an anecdotal story and/or statistics that shows the significance of the work.)*
- If a current AmeriCorps member, share what you will do after your service year. *(This is a chance to share what skills were attained through service and how you plan to apply them in the future.)*
- If an AmeriCorps alum, share how your service shaped your future (professionally and/or personally).
- If you started an organization as a result of your service, be sure to include that too.

Below is a sample story about an AmeriCorps member that gives the reader all the details needed to understand exactly what she did. Use it as a guide to help AmeriCorps members and Alums craft their story.

Example of a Member Impact Story

My name is Lindsey, and I’m an AmeriCorps member serving with College Possible. I tutor high school students like Luis, a great kid from a low-income neighborhood in Saint Paul. During my AmeriCorps service, I’ve helped him and 38 other students raise their ACT scores and apply to college – and they were all accepted! But that’s the norm with my program: AmeriCorps members have helped 98% of College Possible’s students get into college, and those students are 10 times more likely to earn a college degree than their low-income peers. We’re a great investment because every federal dollar invested in our program is matched by four dollars from private, philanthropic, and local funding. Over the past 14 years, College Possible AmeriCorps members like me have reached more than 56,000 students and have served more than 1.2 million hours.



Tips on AmeriCorps Language Use

One vital way to maintain our brand is to make sure our verbal and written communications are as consistent as possible. Here are some key tips to remember as you craft language and talk about the great service you and your members do.

DO SAY	DON'T SAY
AmeriCorps member	Volunteer or worker Corps member Service member
Selected to	Hired to
Serve as	Work as
A year of service	A job

Boilerplate Language

You should include the following standard copy on your website, documents, etc.:

AmeriCorps engages more than 75,000 members in intensive service annually to serve through nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations at 25,000 locations across the country. These members help communities tackle pressing problems while mobilizing millions of volunteers for the organizations they serve. Since 1994, more than 900,000 Americans have provided more than 1.2 billion hours of service to their communities and country through AmeriCorps. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.

AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, Social Innovation Fund, and Volunteer Generation Fund programs, and leads the President's national call to service initiative, United We Serve.

Making an "IMPACT"

Here's a helpful acronym you can use to tell a great story:

I is for **inform**. Our story should make people feel good about themselves, their community, and their government.

M is for **measure**. Our story gives us a chance to share numbers in a compelling way that illustrates our progress.

P is for **personalize**. Our story should connect the audience with the outcome, showing them why they care about or relate to the people we help.

A is for **activate**. Our story gives people something to do. For some, it will motivate them to join national service. For others, it will compel them to share this story with their own networks (friends and families).

C is for **cultivate**. Our story can open the door to new partnerships or relations with elected officials, for example.

T is for **teach**. This one is about us. Through storytelling, we get better at communicating our impact.

Nationwide Quick Stats

It's always helpful for your audience to frame your work in the broader picture of the nationwide service effort. Use these stats* to add national context to your story.

Annually:

- **75,000** AmeriCorps members
- 25,000 service sites

20 years of service (since 1994):

- Nearly **1 million** AmeriCorps members have served
- **\$2.8 billion** in scholarships (Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards) earned

*accurate as of July 2015

Quick AmeriCorps Branding and Messaging Checklist

Web/Digital and Documents

- AmeriCorps logo and standard boilerplate language on websites
- AmeriCorps logo on newsletter and other digital communications
- AmeriCorps logo on print materials and other collateral
- AmeriCorps logo visible in photos used for outreach and recruitment
- AmeriCorps language included in press releases
- Hashtag and handle used when posting to social media

Sites and Members

- AmeriCorps logo on all service gear (t-shirts, etc.)
- AmeriCorps logo on signage at events
- “AmeriCorps Serving Here” signs at service sites
- AmeriCorps members prepped with elevator speech
- AmeriCorps members prepped with impact story

Branding the “A” Wrap-Up

The AmeriCorps branding and messaging resources and recommendations shared in this guide offer AmeriCorps grantees a multitude of ways in which to share, promote and brand the “A.” From proper and frequent placement of the AmeriCorps logo, to using the #AmeriCorps hashtag in social media posts, to helping members learn to share their AmeriCorps impact story, this document can help focus and enhance your public education and outreach efforts.

As described throughout this guidance, the AmeriCorps “A” is more than a logo or a checklist bullet point; it is a symbol of our nation’s tradition of individuals from all walks of life coming together to solve their community’s greatest challenges. Branding the “A” is key to cultivating and growing our national service movement, and it takes an investment of the entire AmeriCorps community to move this message forward. We become stronger when we share a common voice and together brand and message AmeriCorps in a common, consistent, and visible way.



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For more information, please visit NationalService.gov/AmeriCorps.



1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20525
Tel: 202-606-5000
TTY: 202-565-2799
NationalService.gov

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