CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Program Questions

Corporation for National and Community Service is closely monitoring the latest developments related to COVID-19. As Americans prepare for the possibility of a COVID-19 outbreak in their community, you may have concerns about the potential impact of this new virus on your program. To help address these concerns, we are providing you with these FAQs. They will be updated regularly.

These FAQs do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies. You should refer to CNCS’s statute and regulations for applicable requirements.

1. What should we share with our members/volunteers about Coronavirus/COVID-19?

All of us can take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Everyone can do their part to help respond to this emerging public health issue. The best source of COVID-19 resources is the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The CDC with the Department of Health and Human Services is the lead government agency on the management of the Coronavirus outbreak. They have created resource guides on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in specific communities. This includes specific guidance for childcare centers and schools, colleges and universities, community events, and first responders, among many others. These guides, along with additional resources and up-to-date information from the CDC, can be found at the following links. [updated 3/12]

- CDC Coronavirus Hub
- Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Communities

2. I am an AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, or Senior Corps grantee or project sponsor. Who should I contact with questions?

AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA, or Senior Corps Project Sponsors should contact their Portfolio Manager or Program Officer. [updated 3/12]

3. I am an AmeriCorps NCCC Project Sponsor. Who should I contact with questions?

NCCC Project Sponsors should contact their NCCC Region campus staff with questions. [updated 3/12]

4. What if a member or volunteer is showing symptoms of illness or respiratory problems? Should they be sent home?

Yes. Grantees and project sponsors should instruct members and volunteers to stay home and not return to their service sites until they are free of fever (100.4 degrees or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of fever, and any other symptom for at least 24 hours, without medication. Grantees and project sponsors should also document the reason for the determination to instruct a member or volunteer to stay home due to illness.
To prevent stigma and discrimination during service, do not make a determination to send a member or volunteer home based on race or country of origin. Also, ensure that you maintain confidentiality of any member(s) and volunteer(s) who are confirmed to have COVID-19 or other illnesses as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).
[updated 3/12]

5. What if a member or volunteer lives with or has been in close contact with someone known to have COVID-19?
What should grantees and project sponsors do?
Service members and volunteers who are well but live with, or have been in close contact with, someone who is known to have COVID-19 should promptly notify their respective program/project director. More importantly, the individual should self-report to their physician, and in consultation with their physician, to the state health department responsible for the local management of COVID-19 issues.

The grantee or project sponsor should also refer to CDC guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure. While maintaining confidentiality, the grantee or project sponsor should inform fellow service members and volunteers of their possible exposure to COVID-19 at the service site. [updated 3/12]

6. Should my organization cancel planned congregate events (e.g.: training, recognition ceremonies or other special events)?
Each organization should make the decision on whether to proceed with upcoming congregant events by consulting information from the Centers for Disease Control and other relevant state and local agencies. A list of state and territorial health organizations can be found at the CDC State Health Department Portal. [updated 3/12]

7. Will CNCS be cancelling upcoming trainings and convenings such as the Senior Corps Convening or upcoming AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsor Events?
Yes, the agency has cancelled and/or postponed all meetings, convenings and events through May 15. The agency is monitoring the situation in locations where events after May 15 are planned and will make a determination on whether to proceed with the advice and counsel of federal and local health officials for each jurisdiction. Grantees or project sponsors should continue to monitor the CNCS website and other communication for updates. [updated 3/12]

8. What if our organization has paid for staff, member, and/or volunteer travel that is canceled by the host organization or it is otherwise imprudent for the travel to happen as planned?
Due to safety concerns, CNCS would treat these scenarios like a weather-related travel cancellation and would allow the costs if they are otherwise reasonable and necessary. You should clearly document the reasons for the cancellation as they relate to the specific costs incurred.

Since stipend payments are hourly based (i.e., based on FGP and SCP volunteers’ service hours), FGP and SCP program have discretion to determine the stipend payments made to the volunteers. [updated 3/12]

9. May members be exited for Compelling Personal Circumstances if they are unable to serve?
Within AmeriCorps State and National, grantees determine compelling personal circumstances. Extended site closures and sustained disruptions could reasonably justify a compelling personal circumstances exit under 45 CFR § 2522.230 (a) Release for compelling personal circumstances. [updated 3/12]

For AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC members, the agency will follow established protocols. Grantees and project sponsors should direct specific questions to their Portfolio Manager, Program Officer, or NCCC campus staff.

10. If an AmeriCorps State and National program allows members to do additional training at a time that they cannot serve at their sites, will they be allowed to exceed the maximum 20 percent aggregate training hours?
No, per 45 CFR § 2520.50 How much time may AmeriCorps members in my program spend in education and training activities?, “No more than 20 percent of the aggregate of all AmeriCorps member service hours in your program, as reflected in the member enrollments in the National Service Trust, may be spent in education and training activities.” [updated 3/12]

11. If we have a member or volunteer who is exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19, do we need to notify CNCS? Yes, on a voluntary basis, please notify your Program Officer or Portfolio Manager if you have a member or volunteer who is diagnosed with COVID-19. Share the project name, city location and number of members or volunteers diagnosed. In order to protect the privacy of the individual, please do not share their name or other personally identifiable information. You should follow guidance provided by the CDC and your local health department. [updated 3/17]

12. I understand that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) recently granted relief to some provisions in 2 CFR 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. Does this apply to my organization? OMB released guidance on March 9, 2020 granting “…class exceptions in instances where the agency has determined that the purpose of the Federal awards is to support the continued research and services necessary to carry out the emergency response related to COVID-19.” The federal awarding agency makes this determination. If you receive non-CNCS awards that meet this criteria, please contact OGAInformation@cns.gov, as the extension to submit single audits and possibly other relief may be applicable to your CNCS award(s) as well. [updated 3/17]

13. What is the impact of COVID-19 on access to national service criminal history check (NSCHC) vendors Truescreen and Fieldprint, and how should programs handle Livescan location closures? As of March 18, 2020, CNCS-contracted national service criminal history check (NSCHC) vendors Fieldprint and Truescreen are operating. However, certain Livescan fingerprint locations may be closed due to business-specific reasons and/or local government requirements. To see which Livescan sites are closed, you may check site availability on Fieldprintcncs.com/. CNCS communicates closely with Truescreen and Fieldprint and will issue further notice and guidance if closures become nationwide and/or the sources (FBI/states/NSOPW) become unable to provide results to grant recipients. Livescan locations closed due to Covid-19 are allowing appointments to be scheduled for future dates. Grant recipients may elect to order fingerprint cards or schedule Livescan appointments for a future time when a local site expects to reopen. Scheduling an appointment or having documentation showing that the individual completed their fingerprint card satisfies the requirement to “initiate” the background check (i.e., the requirement that programs initiate the check before member/volunteer/staff begins work or service in a covered position). The results of the NSOPW must be reviewed and documented prior to the person beginning work or starting service (before work, service, or training hours are charged to the grant, federal or match). A person may not accrue hours towards their work or service without first having cleared the NSOPW component of the NSCHC. Checks that are not within these time frames are noncompliant.

Please note: Grant recipients who use Truescreen need to refer to the Truescreen pre-approved ASP (NationalService.gov/CHCFAQs). The criminal history information components (state of service check, state of residence check, and FBI checks) of the NSCHC must be initiated no later than the first day of the start of service or work. Checks that are not within these time frames are noncompliant.

Initiating state and FBI checks is going one step further than getting permission to conduct an NSCHC. This could include, for example, fingerprinting, sending requests to a state repository to get checks, or having candidates fill out official forms for getting the required checks. You must be able to document how and when checks were initiated. You must have policies and procedures outlining how you initiate checks and apply them consistently.
Ordering fingerprint cards or scheduling a Livescan appointment may be considered initiation of a check. [updated 3/27]

14. Are members or volunteers or staff who are suspended for over 120 days, but not exited from service or employment, required to conduct a new National Service Criminal History Check?  
A break in service means that a person is no longer providing service through or receiving salary from a recipient or subrecipient. Temporary interruption of work or service without termination of employment or expiration of the agreement under which service is being provided is not a break in service.

With regard to members, volunteers, or staff suspended or not serving due to COVID-19, such temporary interruption is not a break in service and no new criminal history check needs to be conducted when the members or staff resume service. [updated 3/19]

15. How is the requirement to accompany those for whom State and/or FBI check components are pending affected by COVID-19?  
Covid-19 has not changed the requirement to accompany those who are serving when State and/or FBI check components of the NSCHC are pending.

Individuals in covered positions are required to be accompanied during service or work while state check(s) or FBI check components are pending. A person is accompanied when he or she is in the physical presence of a person who is cleared for access to a vulnerable population.

One possible way to document accompaniment is to indicate on the covered person’s timesheet

1. who accompanied during the covered individual’s access to a person in a vulnerable population,
2. on what dates and hours the accompaniment took place, and
3. have the person who performed the accompaniment incrementally sign off and attest to the accuracy of the documentation.

You should have policies and procedures that clearly describe your accompaniment guidelines and documentation procedures. The documentation should show the day, times, accompanier and individual accompanied. If you need to amend the policy to reflect necessary adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, your organization should document the change, and the organizational approval of the change.

For individuals who will be teleserving as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, programs must ensure that communication with vulnerable populations includes accompaniment. This may be done via conference call, carbon copy on emails, or other means specific to the teleservice.

Please direct questions regarding NSCHC vendors or NSCHC access to CHC@cns.gov. [updated 3/27]

Information for Members and Volunteers:

1. May I leave my site for a compelling health reason, such as I have a compromised immune system?  
Yes, members and volunteers who are unable to serve at their assigned service location should work individually with their project sponsor and program to determine an appropriate alternative. Members/volunteers must notify their project sponsor/program about their risk to potential exposure. See CDC guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure. [updated 3/12]
2. If I am serving in AmeriCorps NCCC or AmeriCorps VISTA, will CNCS pay for the return to my Home of Record (HOR)?
If you are unable to complete your service term, we will follow normal VISTA and NCCC program protocols for returning members to their Home of Records, where appropriate. [updated 3/12]

3. Can we teleserve?
For AmeriCorps State and National and AmeriCorps VISTA members, please refer to the teleservice policies AmeriCorps State and National Teleservice Guidance and AmeriCorps VISTA Teleservice Guidance. For Senior Corps sponsors, please follow the appropriate guidance as outlined in the Senior Corps Operations Handbook. [updated 3/12]

For more information, please visit:
- CDC Coronavirus
- U.S. Government Response to Coronavirus