

# Corporation for National and Community Service

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## Transformation and Sustainability Plan Frequently Asked Questions

In June 2018, the CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service announced a comprehensive plan to make improvements to better serve our customers, meet community needs, and position national service for greater impact and growth. Developed after months of review and incorporating ideas from a wide range of stakeholders, the CNCS [Transformation and Sustainability Plan](#) outlines specific steps the agency will take to:

- Ensure our core business functions are accountable and effective.
- Make it easier for organizations and individuals to participate in our programs.
- Strengthen our impact in communities by prioritizing evidence-based models.
- Align our workforce and workplaces to better serve our customers, meet evolving needs, and ensure efficient use of public funds.

More information is available at [NationalService.gov/Transformation](https://NationalService.gov/Transformation). Please feel welcome to send questions to [transform@cns.gov](mailto:transform@cns.gov).

### General Questions:

#### 1.) What is the Transformation and Sustainability Plan?

The Transformation and Sustainability Plan is a comprehensive plan that includes a set of [six goals](#) that will better position CNCS to support the growth of national service. These goals are:

- Strengthening core business functions
- Strengthening and aligning grants management and monitoring to improve efficiencies and maximize effectiveness
- Prioritizing evidence-based interventions
- Streamlining the application process
- Simplifying and strengthening the CNCS brand
- Aligning our workforce and workplaces to better serve our customers, meet evolving needs, and ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

## 2.) Why do we need the Transformation and Sustainability Plan, and why now?

As we mark the 25th anniversary of CNCS, our Transformation and Sustainability Plan makes long overdue improvements to better support our customers, and position national service for greater impact and growth for another 25 years and beyond. The communities around us are changing and, to serve them best, we must change too. The implementation of the plan is crucial to positioning CNCS to strengthen our national service programs for years to come – through better serving our customers, meeting the needs of the nation, and being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. Ultimately, this plan is about growth: putting CNCS on sound footing so that more people, more organizations, and more communities will access and benefit from national service.

## 3.) How does the Transformation and Sustainability Plan strengthen CNCS's ability to serve our customers?

The plan makes long overdue improvements to strengthen operations and better serve and support our grantees, sponsors, partners, members and volunteers, and increase community impact. These changes will:

- Increase access and make it easier for organizations and individuals to participate in our programs.
- Improve customer service by putting more staff and resources in the field where national service happens. Organizations will have a single point of contact, CNCS will have greater organizational depth, and we will put more of our resources in the field supporting our grantees, sponsors, members, and communities.
- Lead to stronger community impact by providing more flexibility to meet emerging needs and ensure investment goes where it is needed.
- Build long-term sustainability by making long-overdue improvements to core business functions.
- Position national service for greater growth and impact in the future.

This plan will not change our important mission and commitment to getting things done in communities across the country, nor will it reduce program funds that flow into states and communities – several streams of which are statutorily and formulaically prescribed. Rather, it will enhance the foundation of our decentralized service delivery model to ensure CNCS can support the growth of national service.

#### **4.) How was the Transformation and Sustainability Plan created? Who was involved?**

These goals were originally envisioned in prior administrations and developed following months of intensive review of our operations and programs. This process took into account a wide range of ideas and recommendations from staff, grantees, sponsors, national service members, the Office of Management and Budget, Congress, the CNCS Office of the Inspector General, and the Government Accountability Office, as well as many years of CNCS evaluations and reports which noted the need for our agency to implement significant changes to how we conduct business. In addition, we received further feedback from Congress during an oversight hearing held in April of 2018, as well as through other informal meetings.

Since the announcement of the plan, our CEO and senior leadership have spent significant time listening to our staff, grant recipients, sponsors, stakeholders, and Members of Congress across the country seeking feedback and requesting ideas for accomplishing the plan's goals. CNCS hosted seven in-person and teleconference listening sessions attended by more than 500 individuals, met with many national and community service stakeholders, and received written comments from more than 260 individuals and organizations. We have met with more than 60 Members of Congress or their staff about the plan. We continue to seek input from grantees, projects, and other stakeholders to inform our ongoing implementation of the plan.

#### **5.) How was the input from stakeholders, including states, sponsors, and grantees, incorporated into the plan specifically?**

The listening period enabled us to hear a multitude of perspectives across all six goals of the plan, which ultimately informed our decision making. We heard many good ideas, and have and will continue to seek to incorporate these ideas into the plan's implementation. For example, as a result of the input, CNCS will create specialty portfolio manager positions to support unique relationships that may require specialized skillsets, such as supporting our vulnerable populations and tribal grantees and sponsors. Overall, the input received has reaffirmed the importance of operationalizing these changes in smart ways that strengthen the work being done by grantee organizations and sponsors.

#### **6.) What is the proposed timeline of when each of the stages of the plan will be started and completed?**

The CNCS Transformation and Sustainability Plan has six goals operating on varying timelines. Work on each has begun and is ongoing. For example, we have made good progress on our first goal of strengthening core business functions by providing new resources and policies to support grantees in strengthening their compliance with criminal history check requirements; advancing our work on a modernized grants management system; and strengthening CNCS's financial management and accounting systems.

There is additional work moving forward on this goal as well as all others, and we will continue to provide updates as we move forward. With regard to CNCS's new organizational roles and regional structure, the agency will transition in three phases over the next two years, beginning in September 2019 and ending in June 2020.

## **Changes to CNCS's New Grant Making Roles and Regional Structure**

### **7.) How will grantees, sponsors, and other partners benefit from the regional office structure and new grant management roles?**

These changes will allow CNCS to:

- Create single points of contact for organizations to help navigate the full menu of national service programs and to administer grants. Under our current operating model, programs are siloed and grantees and sponsors interact with multiple points of contact for a single grant, often resulting in inconsistent information and duplication of work.
- Provide more consistent and equitable service. Today, CNCS program officers' workloads vary significantly depending on location and stream of service. The more balanced workloads possible with a regional structure will lead to more consistent and higher levels of service for grantees, sponsors, and all communities – and ensure national service investments go to where they are needed rather than only where we have staff capacity.
- Enable our agency to keep more resources in the field supporting our grantees, sponsors, and local communities. Our existing 46 state offices spaces – 74 percent of which have three or fewer people -- are becoming more costly to maintain due to rent increases, new federal technology requirements, security, and other infrastructure costs. This leaves CNCS with a choice to support real estate infrastructure or to have more staff to support the impact and growth of national service.

### **8.) How were the regional office sites selected?**

To support the process of selecting regional office sites, CNCS established a working group comprised of diverse staff to deliver data, analysis, and options to senior management for regional field office locations. The working group's process entailed the following:

- With staff input from every office, the working group determined four broad categories of criteria most important to CNCS for its regional office locations: (a) a location's talent pipeline; (b) a location's quality of life; (c) a location's accessibility to CNCS's portfolio of grant and

project investments; (d) an overlay of the highest areas of poverty and (e) a location's cost of staff and cost of office space.

- The group then collected data for each criteria to assess regional composition and the strength of locations. With this criteria and data, the working group composed regional map options ranging from five to 10 regions, developing maps with balanced regions based on CNCS's investment portfolio, U.S. population, U.S. population in poverty, and landmass coverage.
- For each regional map option, the working group assessed the metropolitan region locations within each region against one another based on the identified criteria to compare and rank locations.

#### **9.) What impact will these changes have on the support CNCS provides to grantees and sponsors?**

This plan will not change CNCS's mission or the funds that flow into states and communities. As we make the transition to regional offices, there will not be any gaps in service or oversight. Grantees and sponsors will continue to receive technical assistance and support as they do today, which is predominantly by phone, email, and webinar. Each state and every grantee or project sponsor will have dedicated staff so they know who to contact. CNCS staff will continue to travel as needed to meet in person with grantees or sponsors, to provide trainings, or see projects.

#### **10.) What happens to the CNCS points of contact before regional offices open?**

For now, grantees and sponsors should continue to work with their existing program officers and grant officers. The transition to the new Portfolio Manager will happen between September 2019 and June 2020, with the specific timing based on the area of the country. We will continue to communicate regularly about the changes to ensure a smooth transition.

#### **11.) What parts of the CNCS budget will be used to pay for the transition to a regional structure? What efficiencies will be achieved?**

The costs of transitioning to the regional office structure will be paid for using CNCS's Salaries and Expenditures appropriation, in the same way the agency has historically handled expenses related to office moves or refurbishments. Program funds are not impacted by the change to a regional structure and there is no reprogramming of funds.

It is important to note that to maintain our 46 state offices over the coming two years and beyond, CNCS anticipates significant cost increases due to expiring office leases and a GSA-required upgrade of the information technology platform in all federal government office spaces. If our agency maintained the status quo with 46 offices, CNCS would need to develop efficiencies in other areas of its budget to manage expense increases. The changes CNCS proposes will help us minimize those cost increases and, more importantly, position CNCS with a better operating model that enables us to provide improved and more consistent service.

**12.) Many local government and nonprofit agencies provide matching dollars for CNCS grant funds. What is the plan to maintain long-distance partnerships with these key stakeholders?**

Matching dollars for CNCS grant funds are an essential component to support national service activity and demonstrate the local value of national service investments. CNCS grantees are responsible for identifying and securing matching funds. Historically grantees have managed the relationships with their match providers, and that won't change under this plan.