

AmeriCorps State and National Frequently Asked Questions on Pre-enrollment

1. What exactly is meant by “pre-enrolled?” Can we enroll the member on their first day of service and still count hours for that day?

Pre-enrollment is meant to be the entering of an invitation record so that the individual can be screened by the Social Security Administration matching database prior to them being enrolled in the Trust. A program already would have completed screening the individual for suitability for the planned service activities and have conducted, reviewed, and adjudicated a National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW) check. So long as a member has completed screening and review of all required checks a program may enroll them. It is possible to enroll a member on their first day of service.

2. How can we require pre-enrollment and background checks in advance if it is prior to the program’s receipt of the Notice of Grant Award?

AmeriCorps members may not be enrolled in the MyAmeriCorps Portal before a grantee receives their Notice of Grant Award. There is no requirement that programs conduct screening or pre-enrollment prior to receiving their Notice of Grant Award. Programs must conduct applicant screening prior to the start of member activities.

3. Will programs be required to conduct screening before entering members into the portal, or prior to member service?

All applicants must be screened before the program may assign them a slot-type, service location, certify their start date and take the enroll member action in the Portal. The screening includes SSN verification, citizenship eligibility, and a National Sex Offender Public Website check. Programs should be screening members for suitability and other qualifying factors. In addition, not later than the member’s first day in service, the appropriate state of service, state of residence, and FBI criminal history checks must be initiated.

4. What is the purpose of the removal of the 30-day deadline for notice of enrollment to the National Service Trust?

The intent of the 30-day deadline for notice to the National Service Trust for a member’s enrollment was to facilitate the administrative handling of enrollments given the capabilities of

technology available at the time CNCS's web-based reporting system was created. Twenty years ago many grantees were relying on paper-based systems and information systems were much less reliable than what most programs experience today. The technology and operating conditions for AmeriCorps programs today should not require a month to report enrollments.

5. Can we waive the requirement to screen members for eligibility before their start date?

No, all members are to be screened and confirmed eligible prior to their start date to protect programs from the financial consequences of inadvertently enrolling an ineligible individual and to protect communities, children and vulnerable populations.

6. What are the impacts to background check and/or eligibility processes required by CNCS?

The Social Security Number validity, citizenship verification, and criminal history checking processes are long-standing procedures. The elements of these processes have not changed; rather, the timing for when the checks are conducted is moved to an earlier stage in the enrollment process.

7. Will programs be required to upload NSOPWs and/or initiation documentation of state and FBI checks, or will it be a self-certification?

No, CNCS will not collect NSOPW results or documentation demonstrating criminal history check initiation as part of the enrollment process. Grantees are required certify they have conducted the NSOPW check and have initiated the state and FBI checks. Documentation requirements have not changed; programs are required to maintain documentation that demonstrates they have complied with these requirements.

8. How far in advance can we enroll members? If members enroll at our pre-service sessions held throughout the summer, can we let the completed invitation sit in "Pending Enrollments" in eGrants until we enroll them closer to their start date?

Programs may issue invitations to potential members as soon as they receive their Notice of Grant Award (when their program information is loaded in the MyAmeriCorps Portal). Once a member accepts the invitation, the acceptance record may remain in the pending enrollment workbasket until the program has completed all screening and the member starts their service.

The step of changing the status from pre-enrolled to enrolled cannot be completed until the first day of service and no later than five (5) days after the first day of service.

9. When will the grants be available in eGrants so we can send invitations?

The portal will be available as soon as the Notice of Grant Award is issued by CNCS.

10. What is the expected turnaround time on SSN and citizenship verification?

Records are sent to the Social Security Administration nightly each business day and are updated in the Grantee Portal by the next morning. This is the same timeline that has been in effect since February 29, 2012. There can be unanticipated delays related to technical issues and the agreement with the Social Security Administration is for a response to be provided to CNCS within three business days.

11. Programs will frequently start members the same day or the following day after an offer is made, specifically when filling last slots or late starting members. A prolonged waiting period will hinder program's ability to place members in the field to begin meeting community needs. How should programs address this issue?

Programs are currently required to assess eligibility and conduct an NSOPW check prior to selecting an individual for participation in AmeriCorps and to initiate state and FBI checks no later than the first day of service. The new process shouldn't cause a delay as it involves reporting information about what programs have always been required to do. Overall, four percent of the member population require Manual Verification by CNCS staff for SSN and citizenship verification.

For individuals that are not able to be verified by the Social Security Administration there may be some additional delay while the program works with the Hotline correcting data entry errors or providing additional documentation demonstrating eligibility.

12. If a member SSN or citizenship is not auto-verified and must be manually verified, will this further delay the process?

If an applicant's SSN or citizenship cannot be verified automatically, programs will be required to submit verification documentation to the CNCS Hotline. CNCS staff will review the submitted documentation and update the status to "Manually Verified ". Programs with members not verified automatically may need additional time to complete the enrollment

process and they should look to anticipate challenges by alerting applicants that they may need to provide documentation if they cannot be automatically verified.

The Applicant Portal of the Member Enrollment screen has added text informing the individual that their Personal Identifying Information, such as name, Social Security Number, will be subject to verification through a government computer matching program administered by the Social Security Administration and if their information fails to be verified they will be required to provide documentation to support their eligibility.

13. What do we do about members who show eligibility documents and initiate their state and FBI criminal history checks on their start date?

Programs are required to screen potential members for eligibility *prior* to selecting individuals for service. Programs may have to adjust the sequence of steps to earlier in the review and selection process and this might include potential members share or submit documentation demonstrating eligibility.

14. How do we handle a large volume of rural members where we don't see their identification documents in person until they come to the first day of training?

Programs will need to consider other approaches for capturing identification documentation earlier in their selection process. Programs should build additional time into the review process to accommodate these changes.

15. Will there be a way to submit and approve batch invitations and enrollments?

CNCS intends to roll out an enrollment process later this year that facilitates processing multiple records simultaneously.

16. If a program enrolls a member and they rescind their acceptance prior to their start date, will this count against a program's retention rate? Will these members show up on a member roster?

Rejecting or rescinding an invitation to be a member in your program will not affect the program's retention rate. Only after you have completed your screening and the member has been fully enrolled in your program and does not actually serve their term will the retention rate be affected.

17. If a grantee had a policy to only enroll members after they submitted their first timesheet to avoid the problem of having a member enrolled in eGrants who withdraws or after participating in one day of training, would the grantee expect to have to report an increase in attrition.

Unfortunately, the new enrollment screening procedures and the requirement to report a member's enrollment within five days of their start date may result in increased reported attrition for some programs. Once a member's contract has been signed, the member's Segal Education Award must be recorded in the National Service Trust via enrollment in the Portal. Unreported Trust obligations are potential audit vulnerabilities for the Trust. CNCS recognizes the possibility of reduced retention and for that reason, among others, adjusted the required explanations of retention rate on the end-of-year Grantee Progress Report.

18. If a member is currently serving, do they have to be exited before we can enroll them?

Being enrolled in the Trust in more than one program is subject to rules governing concurrent terms. There are no changes to the concurrent term limitations. An individual cannot be enrolled in more than one full time term of service in a single program year. A currently serving member may receive an invitation to another program. A program may be prevented from enrolling the member in the Trust if that enrollment violates the concurrent term rules.

19. My understanding is that the eGrants start date, Member Service Agreement start date, and first day of recorded service hours must all align. I am assuming the new enrollment policy will not change that expectation, but if it does, will that be included in forthcoming guidance?

The start date a program certifies to in the Portal for a member and the effective start date indicated on the member service agreement/contract should be the same. CNCS bases the requirements for eligibility and criminal history checking on the value programs certify in the MyAmeriCorps Portal. This date normally coincides with the member starting to earn hours toward their Segal Education Award. The grant budget period start date as indicated in the Notice of Grant Award must be on or before the member start date.

20. Will we still get a grace period to correct enrollment errors?

Due to the nature of the changes to the Trust enrollment system, CNCS is not able to build in a grace or transition period. By July 2, 2018, the date the system requirements will change, grant recipients should have adjusted their procedures to be able to enroll in the updated system.

21. Is there a way to walk back an enrollment if an individual never shows up for orientation?

If an individual never starts service, the program should not enroll them. A program should never certify the start date for a member who fails to appear. In all cases, programs will not be taking the final enrollment action in the Portal prior to the member actually starting their service. The applicant should be screened through the invitation process or by selecting an individual through the on-line recruitment system process and their status changed to be enrolled once they have begun service.

22. What happens if we exit the member the same day as they enroll or the next day? Does that affect our retention?

Yes, it will affect the program's retention rate. If a program has completed all of its screening and takes the enrollment action in the Portal on the first day of the member's service and subsequently the program exits the member without an Education Award, it will affect the retention rate for the program.

23. What will the process be for withdrawing a member from the program in eGrants?

There is no change proposed in this process for exiting a member.

24. How do we handle members who exit in the first 2 weeks?

In general, you will exit them without award.

25. Is there a trial periods for members?

There are no trial periods for members. Once a member has been entered into the National Service Trust they are considered AmeriCorps members.

26. Would CNCS be willing to consider exceptions for organizations with more than a certain number of members and/or have multiple grants?

No, CNCS believes that even large programs or organizations with multiple awards will be able to handle the new process.

27. Can we still use paper Enrollment Forms for members that are challenged by the MyAmeriCorps website? Will this increase the need for paper enrollment forms?

Paper enrollment forms will no longer be accepted. If necessary, programs and/or applicants should contact the Hotline for help in resolving technical challenges.

28. Traditionally we offer in-person troubleshooting sessions during our week long in-person training after their start date. How will pre-enrollment screening affect this activity?

There is nothing to prevent a program from providing assistance to prospective members if they find that useful, however, applicants will not be permitted to begin service until they have been screened for eligibility with the program certifying they have reviewed the National Sex Offender Public Website check and the state and FBI checks have been initiated.

29. Does the removal of the 30-day enrollment period mean the 30-day exit period will also be removed?

CNCS is not changing the 30-day exit reporting requirement.