

Recruiting AmeriCorps Members Webinar February 3, 2016

SCRIPT

Slide 1. Welcome

Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. My name is Claudia Birmingham and I work for JBS International. We are the training and technical assistance provider hired by CNCS to assist tribal grantees. Today we will be talking about some ideas and best practices for AmeriCorps member recruitment.

Side 2. Introductions, Housekeeping

First, some housekeeping notes.

- Please note that we are recording. Your phones will be on mute for now but at the end of the call I'll unmute everybody, and we will have time for questions.
- Please jot down your questions for the Question & Answer segment at the end.
- If you have a bad phone connection, please hang up and dial in again.
- If you are on the phone but having trouble accessing web-ex, don't worry –just follow along with the slides we emailed to you yesterday as a PDF file.
- This session is only intended as an introduction and overview to member recruitment. Many of these topics can be explored in much greater detail. We will provide a list of additional resources at the end that you can review at your leisure.
- We will also do a follow-up session on March 8th addressing member support and retention.
- We are lucky today to have Tahsanchat Cooper from the Hoopa Tribal Civilian Community Corps, who will share some of her experience and insights with us a little later.

Slide 3. Agenda

This is our agenda for today.

First, we will do a general overview of member recruitment. Next, we'll talk more specifically about recruiting AmeriCorps members, including:

- What we heard from you in the short poll we sent out last week.
- How to develop an effective recruitment plan, including making the most of limited resources.
- We will talk about recruiting year-round as a best practice, and we'll have some additional tips for recruiting members.
- Last, I will point you toward some helpful resources on the CNCS website, and we will have time for your questions and discussion, and we hope you will share some of your own ideas and best practices on member recruitment.

Slide 4. Overview of member recruitment

As you know, recruiting is an essential activity and requires some planning. Be sure that you set aside time on your calendar.

Some of these activities can overlap, but the basic steps to recruiting AmeriCorps members are to: First, develop member position descriptions; second, find potential members; third, screen and select members; fourth, match members to service roles; and fifth, provide training and orientation and place members at their sites.

Let's talk about each of these steps.

Slide 5. Steps to recruit members

The first step in member recruitment is to develop your member position descriptions. Think about the kind of person you are looking for and what might interest that person.

The description should include, up front, the position title, what the member does and *why* it is important; that is, how the position contributes to meeting a need in the community. Say *where* the member would serve -the service location and whether it is outdoor or indoor work- and *when*. What is the general timeframe for the service?

Slide 6. Steps to recruit members

Then get into the specifics of the position, such as the responsibilities and functions: what are the tasks? Talk about the minimum qualifications an applicant would need to meet; the knowledge, skills, abilities that are required for the position; the type of training they will receive; and the commitment you expect – the term length and hours per week. Also include the supervisor's name, title, and contact information.

Slide 7. Steps to recruit members

Step 2 is to find potential members-people who will apply for the position. We will talk more about this later on.

Step 3 is to screen and select members.

Screening means determining whether an applicant meets the basic eligibility criteria for participation in an AmeriCorps program.

Selecting members entails identifying the best and most promising candidates. Of course, this is usually easier when you have more applicants than positions to fill. Selecting members also means looking for the right mix of members as much as possible – that is, a diversity of people, complimentary talents. This can be particularly important if members work in teams, you want them to be compatible. Members that you select will also need to pass a criminal background check.

Remember you can target your recruitment efforts anywhere you like, but don't exclude anyone solely because they are not a member of the tribe or because they are non-Native.

Slide 8. Steps to recruit members

So after you've selected your members, step 4 involves matching members to service roles. You will want to take into consideration a new member's skills, experience, and personality. If someone you're considering for a position is a less than an ideal match for the position, is there something you can do to improve this? For example, this may be their first job-type situation. Mentoring by a staff person or other member, or a little more hands-on supervision might be enough to make that person an ideal match.

Slide 9. Steps to recruit members

Step 5 involves training, orientation and placement of the new member. You can look at training and orientation as another opportunity to assess member capabilities and matching to service roles. The site- or position-specific training should be done after you're sure about service assignments.

Slide 10. What you told us about recruiting members

So, we talked about the basic steps to recruiting members, but let's take a look at what *you* told us about your recruitment experience. Thanks to those of you who took our short poll.

We asked how you let people know about opportunities to serve with your AmeriCorps program.

- Asking my current members to spread the word (4 of 5)
- Speaking to community groups/organizations (3 of 5)
- Posting on website, blog, or online forum (3 of 5)
- Advertising in the local newspaper (2 of 5)
- Radio or TV adds (2 of 5)
- Other ways:
- E-blast to Tribal community and sending out flyers
- Posting advertisements at Tribal Halls and Native Hire

Slide 11. What you told us about recruiting members

We asked which ways to advertise your program worked best for you.

- Speaking to community groups/organizations (2 of 3)
- Posting on website, blog, or online forum (2 of 3)
- Also: current members, local newspaper, E-blasts, AmeriCorps portal

We asked what kinds of messaging seemed to work best for you.

- Earn an education award (5 of 5)
- Make a difference in the community (5 of 5)
- Earn money serving with AmeriCorps (4 of 5)
- AmeriCorps is a service opportunity to help others (4 of 5)
- Also: Support tribal nation, gain new skills, meet new people

Slide 12. Have an effective recruitment plan

So let's talk about what is involved in a successful member recruitment plan. This includes describing AmeriCorps member opportunities and identifying your target audiences – your future ideal members; developing marketing messages that will motivate, interest, and excite people to get involved; identifying outreach strategies; then finding individuals, organizations and networks to help you get your message out. An effective plan also involves setting a timeline to implement these recruitment tasks and process applications that result from your efforts.

Let's look at each of these in turn briefly, then we'll take a closer look at effective recruitment and hear from Tahsanchat.

Slide 13. Have an effective recruitment plan

The first thing to think about for your recruitment plan is what members will be doing. Describe the AmeriCorps member opportunities: Describe what members will do, where, when, how, and with whom. If this differs by team, for example, then develop additional descriptions as needed.

Identify your target audiences:

- What groups would you like to reach out to for recruitment?
- How do you gain access to them? Who can help you?
- Who within these groups are you particularly interested in recruiting?
- Is there anyone you are overlooking?

Slide 14. Have an effective recruitment plan

Develop marketing messages that will motivate, interest, and excite the people you want to attract as members. Think about:

- What is challenging and exciting about serving in your program?
- What values are members able to realize or fulfill by serving with your program? For example, people often say they volunteer because they want to help the people in their community, to make a difference.
- What opportunities do members create for themselves by serving with your program? What new experiences are they opening themselves up to?
- What are the lasting benefits that come from serving with your program? Learning new skills, developing lasting friendships, knowing that they made a difference in some way...

Slide 15. Have an effective recruitment plan

Identify outreach strategies. Consider:

- How do you get your message out to target audiences? Try to advertise widely, including through word-of-mouth.
- What resources are available to you? Can you get publicity through local media (tribal webpage and newspaper, local radio or TV)? What social media venues are most likely to reach your target audience?
- What's the best timing for outreach? Is there a time when people are more receptive?
- Are there seasonal cycles when you're most likely to reach target audiences and have an impact (e.g., when youth are approaching school graduation and thinking about what to do next)?

Slide 16. Have an effective recruitment plan

Identify individuals, organizations and networks to extend your reach. Consider:

- Who are the key individuals in your community that can extend the reach of your recruitment message and add to its credibility? Who has regular contact with older youth, for example?
- What organizations and associations can you connect with to extend the reach of your marketing efforts?
- Who within these organizations and associations can you speak with to gain their cooperation? For example, consider networking with state education departments, or showcasing your program with table displays at Indian education conferences.

Slide 17. Have an effective recruitment plan

Set a timeline for conducting outreach, processing applications, and getting new members ready.

- Back up from the program start date to determine how much time you need to receive and process applications, make recruitment decisions, train and place members.
- It's recommended that you treat recruitment as a year-round activity (we will talk more on this later).

Slide 18. Closer Look: Effective recruitment

Let's take a closer look at one aspect of your recruitment plan – Developing your marketing or recruitment messages.

- Messages should motivate, interest, and excite potential members. One way to do this is to highlight success stories from actual program alumni.
- Emphasize the personal benefits and opportunities- for example, members are building skills, gaining work experience, and receiving an education award.
- Consider the motivations of your target audience and work this into your messaging: meeting new people, building career skills, getting experiences to put on their resume, providing an avenue to figure out who they are/personal growth, supporting their passions, relating to the causes and organizations they care about, and making a difference in the lives of others.
- Provide highlights about the service – you're helping people while having fun working as a team.
- Include facts about the population your members serve to demonstrate the need in the community that they would be helping to address.
- You might want to connect your program to something larger (e.g., “AmeriCorps members are helping to restore, preserve and protect at-risk habitats and watersheds across tribal lands”, or “AmeriCorps programs nationwide help children with literacy; this is part of a national movement to improve education for underprivileged children.”)
- Consider how you will deliver recruitment message and tailor it to that format; this might be through live presentations (where there can be interaction with the audience), putting up flyers or posters (something visual that catches their eye), through local radio announcements (something they would hear), social media (something they could react to immediately), etc.

Your written recruitment materials should be inspirational and eye-catching. Let's look at an example from the Hoopa Tribal Civilian Community Corps.

[Switch WebEx view to show Hoopa brochure- page 1]:

- Here is an example of attractive layout and graphics in a two page brochure. (Here you are seeing it in color, but even printed in black and white it looks nice; the layout is clear and easy to read).
- The header lets people know this is a current opportunity—“now accepting applications” – and gives them the basic 5-step process.
- The photos and short captions communicate what the program is about (camaraderie, working together in challenging environments, hands-on activities in the outdoors). They show the type of work members do and where.
- The quotes let members speak for themselves about their experience with the program. Current and former members are the peers of your target audience and can be your best spokespeople.
- At the bottom of the page is the contact information for the program, including several ways to do it and the person to ask for.

page 2:

- The second page goes into more detail. Bullet points emphasize what members get from participating (“Earn Great Rewards” lists the tangible benefits like the stipend, child care, education award, and “Training and Self Development” shows them the unique kinds of experiences they will have like swift water rescue and wilderness survival, along with a general timeline).
- The last column lets applicants know what the expectations are and if they qualify.
- The language is straightforward and avoids jargon.
- The tone of the whole brochure is welcoming, upbeat, and encouraging.

So this beautiful brochure is from the Hoopa Tribal Civilian Community Corps and we have the program director, Tahsanchat Cooper, here with us to share some of her experiences.

Slide 19. Tahsanchat Cooper, AmeriCorps Hoopa Program Director

- Recruitment is challenging in your first year. You don’t have a program reputation yet. The more that you can sustain staff and the community sees members graduate, the reputation grows; when people see sustainability in a program, they aren’t so skeptical as to apply.
- There are a lot of resources on the Corporation’s website that as a new program in our first year I didn’t know to take advantage of those. I was barely able to operate as a program let alone have time to research on the website and so if anybody has free time, download some of those things for templates, and maybe they will do something for native programs where all you have to do is change the names.
- Make sure you have the AmeriCorps logo on all of your information. It gives a vested buy-in for people that join the program and tells the community who you are involved with.
- Being honest and telling potential members/applicants really what you want, your expectations, is really important so that you recruit the right kind of member that is drug and alcohol free that’s going to be there for the 1700.
- If you and your staff are excited about AC, that you believe in what AC does and it’s not just a clock in-clock out kind of job, you’re going to have a better success rate. I believe in AC, my kids have been in AC, family members - share these success stories. We’ve created generations of AmeriCorps members in Indian Country.
- Word of mouth - In Indian Country this is especially important. Wherever someone sees you, they are going to stop you and ask you about your program. That is the difference between us and other AmeriCorps programs. We are never really off the clock. The community is here. They are our family or friends. If they see you live a different life style outside of work, they are not going to believe in your program.
- Even though we’ve been around for 18 years, we still work at recruiting around the US. We look for reservation newspapers, for example and advertise, or get a story out. You can also create a form for members who first come to the program that identifies where they are from, local newspaper, high school, nearest city - then create a database.

Slide 20. Make the most of limited resources

So let’s talk a little about how you can make the most of your resources in your recruitment plan.

You’ll want to leverage your existing community connections to formalize the recruitment-referral relationship. They may be able to work your message into their routine outreach to the community. They may come into contact with potential members that you would not typically reach.

Also seek and build new connections where you can. Talk to people and organizations you already know to find out who else can refer interested individuals to your program, and reach out to these people and organizations to establish connections. (This is especially important if you have the challenge of trying to recruit across a wide geographic area.)

Last, identify and tap into previously unreached populations: We will explore this a little later on.

Slide 21. Make the most of limited resources

One way to make the most of your resources is to post flyers in local businesses. These should be eye-catching and informative like the Hoopa example.

If you are doing that, visit businesses where you post flyers periodically to refresh your supply or make sure your flyers are still there.

You might want to include “tear tags” on posted flyers so interested individuals can take a copy of your program’s contact information instead of the flyer itself. Tear tags are those little strips of paper at the bottom of a flyer with contact information that people can rip off.

Put a banner on Main Street, if possible. This can really work and greatly increases the visibility of your program.

Slide 22. Make the most of limited resources

Another way to make the most of your resources is to encourage members be “program ambassadors”. If members serve in a variety of locations and come in contact with individuals who may be interested in joining your program (or know someone who may be interested), then make sure they have written materials that they can give out. I have heard that people who live in an area where AmeriCorps members are working, especially with environmental projects where they are outdoors and visible, will come around because they are curious about what the members are doing. This is another opportunity to talk about the program, and plant a seed for future members.

Communicate with the community about your program. Use public gatherings as a way to make your program visible in the community. Talk to groups and one-on-one with people at public gatherings to raise awareness and attract interested individuals. You may also want to consider doing door-to-door outreach in an area where you know young people are in need of these kinds of opportunities.

Slide 23. Closer look: Making the most of limited resources

Consider tapping into previously unreached populations: Who they might be? How might you reach them?

For example, provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to serve. These individuals typically meet or exceed performance expectation and have low turnover.

Reach out to veterans. These individuals often have leadership experience that can enhance your service efforts as well as inspire other members.

Consider older adults as potential volunteers (there is no age limit on AC members). They have experience, wisdom, and motivation to contribute to your program.

Last, think about how to involve youth both on and off the reservation who are looking for opportunities.

Slide 24. Recruiting year-round

It is a good idea to recruit members year-round, and one way to do this is to offer periodic informational sessions about joining AmeriCorps. These can be offered at venues where potential applicants are likely to gather or be found.

- Be sure to advertise in advance through social media and other venues.
- Once you have their attention, give your audience examples of the service that members provide and how it impacts the community – try to inspire them. Invite a current or former member to help you.
- People always appreciate refreshments if you can provide them. This can also create a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.
- Be sure to stick around to answer questions after your presentation.
- And have application materials ready, but also give people flyers or brochures that they can take home and think about.

Slide 25. Recruiting year-round

Here are some suggestions for recruiting year-round.

- Relying on members to be ambassadors for your program and providing them with a kit of materials can help you accomplish year-round recruitment.
- Post flyers throughout the year as they will get taken down periodically.
- Make arrangements with schools and local organizations to conduct recruitment days involving presentations and/or setting up tables.
 - Include visuals (slides, pictures) in your presentations if you can. It helps people to imagine what you are talking about and remember it.
 - Make sure the presentation includes an explicit request from your audience to apply to join AmeriCorps.
- Note down contact information for people who express interest and send them application materials when your application period begins.

Slide 26. Recruiting year-round

- As you recruit year round, respond promptly to applications and inquiries. Don't let the line go cold! Respond to inquiries as they come in, if possible, or within 24 hours. Follow up with written materials so they have a reminder of what you talked about.
- Individuals will be most responsive within a few days of applying. Let applicants know you got their application and when they can expect an answer.
- When you receive an application, do a quick review and follow up with applicants if there is missing information.
- Have a knowledgeable and enthusiastic person ready to answer phones. Since *you* can't always be that person, designate a trusted backup to help. This could even be a member that you prepared for this role.

Remember when you are recruiting, AmeriCorps may not be for everybody. Applicants should understand that it entails hard work and dedication- but there are also rewards, including helping the community, forming lasting bonds of friendship, developing a sense of belonging and purpose, gaining valuable work experience, and supporting one's education.

Slide 27. Additional tips on recruiting members

Here are a few final tips on recruiting members.

Plan on over-recruiting so you can select the best candidates: Anticipate some applicants will not complete the application, while others may not meet eligibility criteria, so it's best to over-recruit. If you have to select from more eligible candidates than available positions, then you'll have the best choice of members. You can also keep the excess individuals on a waiting list in case you have any no-shows or early dropouts.

Slide 28. Additional tips on recruiting members

If you recruit outside the community, plan to provide these members with cultural orientation. This will be very important because you can't assume team members from different backgrounds will mesh automatically.

Identify and focus on the aspects of culture that will be most relevant to new members' service experience. For example, if service involves tutoring or mentoring youth, then non-Native members may need to understand how families are organized (e.g., kinship relationships), values, and intergenerational aspects of Native culture.

Involve both Native and non-Native members in cultural orientation. Let your Native members help non-Native members gain a better understanding of the cultural environment where they will serve. Members may be able to relate cultural ideas to each other better than if it comes from a staff person.

Slide 29. Additional tips on recruiting members

Start by building a cluster of trusting relationships and leverage these relationships to expand your network.

Work continuously to build your program's reputation. Especially for new programs, building your reputation is a gradual process. Don't expect to have a good reputation (or any reputation at all) at the outset based on the AmeriCorps brand.

Your members are the "public face" of your program. Making sure they present themselves professionally will go a long way towards enhancing your program's reputation.

Monitor service efforts and projects to ensure things are done properly and on-time. Strive to exceed expectations.

Demonstrate concern and accountability when expectations are not met. By developing a reputation for reliability and quality, your program's reputation will rise in the community. This will also attract a greater number of motivated applicants.

Slide 30. Additional Resources

If you haven't already, please take a look around the national service website for examples that may help you with your member recruitment. Even though they may not specifically say they are for tribal programs, many of the materials can be adapted to fit your program so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Here is a list of some helpful resources at the national service website. (I will email you these links after the call.)

- Introduction to AmeriCorps members, http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Intro%20to%20AmeriCorps%20Members%20Final_tagged.pdf
- EnCorps – Resources to support member recruitment, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/member-and-volunteer-development/encorps/encorps-resources-support-member-recruitment-and>
- Develop a recruitment plan, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment/encorps/develop-recruitment-plan>
- Interview questions, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/americorps-intqs-1.pdf>
- AmeriCorps member position descriptions (e-Course), http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/olc/slides/Position_Descriptions.pdf
- Position description template, http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/position_description_templatetool.pdf

Slide 31. Q and A/Discussion

If you would like us to take a look at your own member recruitment materials, please email them to cbirmingham@jbsinternational.com to get our feedback!

And now I would like to open it up to any questions you might have, or ideas on anything we talked about that you would like to share.