

AmeriCorps Member Training and Retention Description of Audio

Welcome to today's session on AmeriCorps Member Training and Retention. Today's webinar is one in a series of presentations designed for new AmeriCorps program staff to provide guidance on AmeriCorps program requirements, best practices, and resources available to support program development.

Before we jump in to our content today, I want to take a few minutes and make sure you are accessing everything you need on this WebEx.

- Please open the Chat Box feature to participate today; take a moment now to send a greeting to your colleagues via the Chat Box.
- Use the Chat Box to ask a question and share comments during the webinar; please select To Everyone on the distribution list.
- The audio recording and PowerPoint slides of this presentation will be posted on the National Service Knowledge Network.
- Encourage participants to read the comments and reach out to colleagues. This could be an opportunity to learn about a program or commission with interesting info to share; can personally message each other.

I want to take a couple of minutes to hear who's on the WebEx today. On the slide, you'll see the types of grantees and CNCS staff who may be joining us. Please take a minute and type in the name of your agency in the Chat Box on your screen.

Thank you; it looks like there is a mix of prime grantees as well as a couple of my CNCS colleagues on the call.

I am the Training Specialist for grantee training and technical assistance in the AmeriCorps State and National unit at the Corporation for National and Community Service. In this role, I work with CNCS staff, contractors, and national service colleagues in the field to design and deliver resources that will help programs and commissions engage AmeriCorps members in great service.

I came on staff 2 years ago – before joining CNCS, I was the director of a state commission and an AmeriCorps state program in Maryland. Today, I'll draw on my own professional experiences with member management as well as the resources developed at CNCS over the years.

On today's webinar, we will discuss these items:

- AmeriCorps Member Retention
- Member Orientation
- Member Training
- ASN Grantee Training Resources
- Take-aways to apply to your programs

With any topic related to AmeriCorps member management, I think it's important to "begin with the end in mind." In the AmeriWorld, the end of any program effort is the successful completion by the AmeriCorps members. So, with that, we'll start today's discussion looking at AmeriCorps member retention.

In AmeriCorps lingo, member retention equals the successful completion of the service term. The members achieve success in their service outcomes and experience. This leads to significant impact on clients and communities served that we aggregate across the AmeriCorps network. In turn, when we're successful, we are able to show that the public investment in the AmeriCorps program overall is important and worth sustaining.

The importance of making it through the AmeriCorps year – or term of service, if it's less than a full year -- is all over the pledge.

Members pledge that when "Faced with adversity, I will persevere...."

And we ask each member to pledge that "I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond."

On the grants management side, what is the CNCS requirement for member retention? The CNCS requirement is stated explicitly in the End-of-year Grantee Progress Report Instructions:

- For retention, any rate below 100% is assessed as not meeting CNCS expectations.
- Grantees are required to provide an explanation for not meeting CNCS expectations and a plan to achieve 100% retention in the future.

What factors impact member retention?

- Please take a moment to answer the question in the Chat Box.
- For example, in your experience, health challenges may have prevented members from successfully completing their terms of service.
- Common challenges reported by AmeriCorps programs have included: health, job/school attendance, change in financial status, need to relocate, bad fit with program

To understand what helps members stay – and resist the urge to declare "I quit!" – we can look at the many years of research available from the human resources management field. Overall, this research indicates that, unsurprisingly, strong management is a big factor in employee retention. Unhappy employees – and those who resign – complain about absentee supervisors, micro-managing supervisors, bad meetings, and/or uncomfortable workspace. These complaints reflect a sense that, overall, poor management is the most important factor in an employee's motivation and retention at the place of employment.

AmeriCorps program management is represented in this way: The Cycle of AmeriCorps Program Development. The Cycle is a general outline for how an AmeriCorps program may create the appropriate structure to help members be successful. This is a general program model – the way that it looks will vary tremendously around the country – tribal programs will design and deliver programs that meet their own communities' needs; multi-state programs will look very different in different parts of the country; and state programs will also be tailored to reflect the needs of their states and community members.

The program development cycle is an ongoing process, and member management tasks occur throughout it. This is also a good way to think about continuous improvement – as you continue to move through your program's own development cycle.

There are three elements of the Cycle that particularly relate to member retention:

Vision phase: In the first phase of AmeriCorps program development, programs need to articulate how member service will positively impact the community need or problem the program is addressing. It is in this earliest phase of program development that program staff must be able to tell potential members what difference they will make as a result of their service.

Foundation-building: In the next phase of AmeriCorps program development, programs need to provide details on the exact tasks and nature of the member service in the required member service agreement and the position description. These two program management tools will show members exactly how they will be successful and make a difference in their communities.

Implementation: In the third phase of AmeriCorps program development, programs need to equip their members with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful.

What is the CNCS member training requirement?

CNCS language combines orientation and training. For our purposes today, I want to separate them out for a quick discussion.

These are the required items in the 2015 AmeriCorps Grant Terms and Conditions, page 8:

- Member orientation
- Prohibited activities

In addition, guidance on member orientation and training is infused throughout CNCS guidance for AmeriCorps grantees: from the annual NOFO to the regulations. All of this reflects our overall goal for member orientation and training: to equip AmeriCorps members with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully complete their terms of service.

Orientation prepares the participant for her/his relationship to the AmeriWorld. Orientation is the first step in cultivating a positive working relationship with AmeriCorps members; a thorough orientation can help reduce members' anxiety about their new service role, and it can help establish positive expectations for performance and communication that will last throughout the service term. There are three aspects of strong orientations: cause, system, and social. Together, these three aspects form a solid sense of how the AmeriCorps program will function, and where the AmeriCorps member is placed in the program.

No matter the program design, all members need these three types of orientation.

Cause orientation tells the participant why she should be serving in this program and in AmeriCorps.

Topics to include are: community need/problem addressed by the AmeriCorps program; information about clients/community served; mission and values of the organization, its programs and services; and the history of the organization

System orientation provides the structure of the program – and helps the participant see how she will be serving.

Topics to include are: staff structure and hierarchy; tour of facilities and equipment; program timeline/year-at-a-glance; policies and procedures, requirements, benefits, and record-keeping

Social orientation helps the participant see how she will fit into the program – and to the AmeriWorld.

Topics to include are: office/site culture and etiquette; full team introductions, including board, executive leadership, managers, volunteers, and other AmeriCorps members; and, if applicable, introductions to the program clients

What does your orientation look like?

1. How do you orient your AmeriCorps members, site supervisors, or subgrantees to the AmeriWorld?

Examples: In-person meetings, calls or webinars, site visits/field trips, written materials, podcasts, videos

2. Who provides the orientation in your agency?

Please take a moment to answer the questions in the Chat Box.

A thorough orientation (which includes all three of the elements discussed earlier) is necessary for all AmeriCorps members – no matter the program type or design.

Next we'll turn our attention to AmeriCorps member training. In this aspect of AmeriCorps program management, there are great opportunities for customization and for creativity.

A training program puts these pieces together: the program needs, the member needs, and the targeted changes in knowledge and behavior that must occur in order for the members to succeed. As you can see on the slide, the ultimate outcome of training is behavior change, and training is an active learning experience.

Another way of looking at the member training program design is by examining the connection between the duties members will be required to perform and the qualifications that applicants will need to have in order to enroll in the program. The training program must include specific guidance and skills training to prepare members for their assigned duties, if they are not required to have those skills when they arrive.

The timing, topics, methods, and training staff of AmeriCorps training programs vary across the network. Next we'll take a look at a few different examples of training plans by program type.

This is an example of a training program for a full-time conservation corps program operating over an 11 month period. In this example, you can see that the AmeriCorps program begins its annual training program with a site orientation before the AmeriCorps members arrive. Once the members arrive, there is a week-long orientation and then a skills-building institute for the second week of the training. From there, the program provides monthly trainings/every four weeks, a mid-year retreat that includes extensive work on Life After AmeriCorps plans, a service year finale, and the engagement of program alumni, commission staff, and CNCS staff as trainers and presenters.

This is an example of a training program for a tutoring program that engages half-time AmeriCorps members in a nine month service term. In this example, you can see that the AmeriCorps program also begins its annual training program with a site orientation before the AmeriCorps members arrive. Once the members arrive, there is also a week-long orientation and then a skills-building institute for the second week of the training. For this program example, the skills-based training is focused on the tutoring curriculum with which the members will work. From there, the program provides a one-day

training/every quarter, a mid- year member performance review, a program graduation that allows the members and their students to demonstrate the results of the tutoring program.

The final example describes a training program for a summer program that engages minimum-time AmeriCorps members in a summer-long nutrition program. In this example, you can see that the AmeriCorps program also begins its annual training program with a site orientation before the AmeriCorps members arrive. And, as with the first two examples, this program example also includes a member orientation and skills-based training in the first two weeks of the service term. The program then convenes members for a half-day of training each week to provide opportunities for reflection, Life After AmeriCorps activities, and a program celebration at the end of the summer.

Together, these examples underscore the importance of orienting site supervisors to their roles in the AmeriCorps program design; the distinction between general orientation and tailored skills-based training; a routine of in-service meetings to continue to build connections amongst participants and engage a variety of presenters; and the conclusion of each program wrapping up in a way that makes the most sense to its design and member service.

What does your member training look like?

1. *What activities* do you include in your training program?

Examples: Role-plays, scavenger hunts, games, music/poetry/dance performances, feats of strength

2. *Who* leads the training program and/or activities?

Please take a moment to answer the questions in the Chat Box.

Across the national service network, the topics below are frequently found in member orientation and training plans:

- AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities
- Member Role and Responsibilities
- Site Role and Responsibilities
- National Service History
- Life After AmeriCorps

For each of these topics, programs may re-enforce the content by presenting content and key ideas in the site and member orientation sessions, and then deepening learning and retention of the concepts through a variety of diverse types of training activities.

- AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities—an example of an orientation topic would be the required member service agreement. Active and engaging training activities like case studies can help sites and members learn and apply the important concepts contained in the list of AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities.
- Member Role and Responsibilities—an example of an orientation topic would be the required member position description. Active and engaging training activities like 30 Second Spots or AmeriCorps Idol can help members learn how to describe AmeriCorps and their role in the program to the general public, family, and friends.

- Site Role and Responsibilities—an example of an orientation topic would be the required member service agreement. Active and engaging training activities like case studies can help sites and members learn and apply the important concepts contained in the list of AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities.
- National Service History—an example of an orientation topic would be the site memorandum of understanding or agreement, which provides a detailed description of the AmeriCorps program design, member roles, and site supervisor responsibilities. Active and engaging training activities like role-plays to illustrate key concepts, like member evaluation requirements, can help sites learn and apply critical aspects of AmeriCorps member management.
- Life After AmeriCorps—an example of an orientation topic would be an introduction to AmeriCorps Alums, a nonprofit association created to promote AmeriCorps and provide continued professional development for AmeriCorps members after they complete their terms of service. Active and engaging training activities like skills-building workshops on professional development can help members understand the full range of benefits and resources available to support them.

One challenge for all AmeriCorps programs is how to teach the history of national service and provide a context for members to understand how they fit in to that history in a way that is engaging and active. To accomplish this, in my AmeriCorps program we created and constantly refined an activity called National Service Time Travel.

National Service Time Travel Activity

What is it?

- Combination of full group and individual activity to teach key points in national service history; best led at the start of the service term
- AmeriCorps members and program staff participate
- Requires large enough meeting space for all participants to move around comfortably and to post up to 12 sheets of newsprint

How does it work?

- On the newsprint, post a few key events in history and pop culture
- Walk through the years and ask participants to contribute items to history/pop culture; as you move through, present the key events in national service history, connect them to the broader world, and explain why members need to know them
- Ask participants to put themselves on it: using Post-it notes, identify 3 points in time that impacted your decision to serve with AmeriCorps

Here are a few examples to illustrate how the National Service Time Travel facilitator presents key events in history and pop culture and then connects important moments in national service history to that.

1900-1925:

History/Pop Culture—World War I occurred during this period; air conditioning was patented by Willis Carter in 1906; and the first hybrid electric/internal combustible engine car was created in 1916.

National Service—In 1910, William James published ‘the Moral Equivalent of War,’ an essay that urged American leaders to create a non-military service program to build the character of young citizens. This essay and the debate it raised reflected the rise of the United States as an international force and the desire of many citizens to eliminate warfare.

1926-1950:

History/Pop Culture—World War II occurred in this period along with the Great Depression and the birth of the Baby Boom generation; the Twinkie was created in 1932; cable television was introduced in Pennsylvania in 1948.

National Service—In response to the Great Depression, in 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps, a large national job program that mobilized thousands of young men in public works projects across the country. In all, the CCC mobilized over three million young men in the nine years the program existed (1933-1942). CCCers planted three billion trees to help reforest America, constructed more than 800 parks and upgraded most state parks, updated forest fire fighting methods, and built a network of service buildings and public roadways in remote areas. The CCC is the model on which many AmeriCorps programs – including the current National Civilian Community Corps (AmeriCorps NCCC) – were built.

Why is the National Service Time Travel activity cool?

- Allows participants to see (in broad strokes) how national service has developed over the years and how it connects to past national and international events (the pop culture events are for fun only)
- Allows participants to put themselves in the history of national service – by contributing their own important life events that led them to AmeriCorps
- Allows staff and members to learn more about each other’s backgrounds and motivations for serving
- Allows program staff to adjust references in history/pop culture to connect directly with members and their communities—to customize the timeline each year to reflect the unique attributes of each cohort of AmeriCorps members in the program

Tailoring the National Service Time Travel Activity:

For each cohort of AmeriCorps members, tailor the timeline activity specifically and consider, as appropriate for your program, inserting history and pop culture references that reflect various ages, ethnicities, gender, physical abilities, races, religions, and sexual orientations.

During today’s discussion, we have reviewed the sources of AmeriCorps requirements that govern member retention and training.

I know that was quite a lot of information – What questions or comments do you have at this time?

This is an overview of the types of grantee training and resources that I work on – and that exist to help you and your colleagues. Depending on your location, you may also have access to written materials, online trainings, and in-person events at your State Service Commission or parent organization.

Grantee Resources and Training:

- Written Materials/Guidance—ex: AmeriCorps Start-up Guide, How to Complete Member Service Listings in the Member Portal
- Online Presentations—ex: Today’s webinar, 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Symposium
- In-person Meetings and Events—ex: Symposium, Regional National Service Training Conferences

Here’s a quick reminder of the ways in which you and your program can stay current on new resources and trainings that come up:

- National Service Knowledge Network – AmeriCorps State and National Resources Page: www.nationalservice.gov/resources/ameri-corps
- Communications with your CNCS Program Officer and monthly TTA Updates from the ASN Training Specialist.

Here are two additional and important resources to support strong member management:

- *AmeriCorps Alums*: www.americorpsalums.org
- *America’s Service Commissions*: <http://statecommissions.org>

As a reminder, today’s presentation is part of our annual training and technical assistance plan for AmeriCorps State and National grantees. The next AmeriCorps program development webinar will occur on March 17, 3:00 – 4:30 pm Eastern, the topic will be: Monitoring Sites and AmeriCorps Members.

Thank you so much for your time today – and for your great work in our service world.