

AmeriCorp State and National Symposium 2016
September 21-23, 2016, Alexandria, VA
CNCS Updates
Wednesday, 9/21 4:30pm – 5:00pm
Transcription

BILL BASL: Our afternoon session today is titled CNCS Updates, and what we wanted to do today was provide just a kind of a brief overview on some of the topical areas that we think will be of interest to all of you. Many of the speakers today and their staff will be going into more depth on these topics at various workshops tomorrow and the next day. So before we begin, I wanted to introduce each of my colleagues to you, then we'll start and then have them offer comments for about 4 or 5 minutes, and then we want to reserve some time later on for some questions from the audience. So those of you who are talking and at the end of the rows, if you wouldn't mind joining us because we'd like to hear your observations, too. Thank you.

So joining us today, to my immediate left, is Kelly DeGraff. Kelly is the Director of our Disaster Services Unit, and is Senior Advisor to the CEO on Disaster Services. If you haven't, you will hear about all of the activities that we have going on around the country. Kelly helps us kind of keep that organized, and she's going to talk to us not only about that but other issues of the day relating to disaster response.

Next to Kelly is Dana Bourne. Dana is our Director of Grants. Dana is going to talk about that office. Many of his staff are here, and many of you have talked to Grant's officers as different from program officers, and we thought this would be a great idea for you to see Dana, talk to Dana, and hear from Dana as he fairly new to the Corporation for National Community Service.

Next to Dana is Lori Giblin. She is our Chief Risk Officer. I know that might be a new term for many of you but it is a term that you'll be hearing more of as you work with other units of federal government, and especially in this agency in terms of risk and what is risk, and the responsibilities her office has.

Next is Woody Davis from the Office of Information Technology. He's going to be sharing with all of you some of the updates, some of the modernization ideas that are out there and where we are in the whole process of modernization.

Next to Woody is Ted. Ted is the Director of External Affairs. Ted is also someone that you'll hear at a variety of workshops as we go forward.

And finally, next to Ted is Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi, our Deputy for AmeriCorps State and National.

So going forward, I just wanted to talk just briefly about what those pieces of paper are that next to you or that you're sitting on. We thought that since we had close to 1,000 AmeriCorps

members serving in Louisiana, that it would be good for them to hear from you a word or two of encouraging. So through the workshop, if you wouldn't mind picking up one of those sheets of paper and write I would say an affirmative message, a message of encouragement, a message of support, letting them know that you're thinking about them. Many of the commissions and programs in this room have sent members to Louisiana, and they've been there now for close to 4 weeks, so a word of encouragement would be great. And if you can do that, Beth Binkley, whose photo you see there, is a program officer who works for AmeriCorps State and National, Beth will be in Louisiana this time next week, and so she will be hand-carrying your messages of support to every AmeriCorps member who is serving in Louisiana. So if you can do us a favor and send a note, you can either bring them up here or leave it on your chair, and we'll collect them now and throughout the conference. And so with that, we'll start, and we'll go down the table – Kelly, Dana, Lori, Woody, Ted Miller, and Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi. Kelly?

KELLY DEGRAFF: HI, everyone. I'm not sure how I feel about this clear podium but we'll go with it. It's great to be here with you all, and I appreciate the time. Bill, thank you very much. It's been quite a year since I last stood in front of you, and since around this time last year we've been responding and recovering from disasters nonstop. Whether it's been snowstorms, or hurricanes, or dangerous levels of lead in our drinking water, tornadoes, hurricanes, we've been going nonstop, and it's been a true partnership with the commissions and the commissions and the AmeriCorps programs on the ground. I was going to spend my time really giving highlights of our work and sharing that and sharing how important the commissions are, and know that I feel that in my heart. I love you all, and I see some great faces out there.

But what occurred to me was that I really should be acknowledging that September is National Preparedness Month. How many of you knew that? Yay, all right, all right! So September is National Preparedness Month, and it really is very important that we take time as individuals, with our families, and then with our programs and in our communities to really look at what does preparedness mean. As leaders in our communities, as the National Service representative, taking that time and figuring out what are the hazards, both environmental hazards, disaster hazards, as well as personal hazards that are there to affect you where you live, where you work, and even where you may visit when you go on vacation. How many of us think about having a plan for that area that we're on vacation?

This is so important, and our country continues on a regular basis, unfortunately, to be tested by trial and tragedy, and we always overcome and we continue to push forward, but at what cost, right? And so if we took some time and really thought about having some plans in place, I think that we would be better off as individuals, as families, as communities, as a country, and that's why – I think this is the second year that we will be sponsoring what we're calling the National Service Safety Stand-Down. We put information out on this and we'll put it out again, but this is a time that's really for encouraging programs and commissions to take a day and to talk about everything from personal safety to those environmental hazards, so everything from mental health to tornadoes to whatever it may be in the region that you live in that you may be most affected by, and taking that time and creating that plan and taking action.

As leaders in our community, I think that it is up to us to really prepare ourselves to meet the unknowns that we don't know what tomorrow is going to bring or what challenge it's going to

bring, but we need to be able to say that we are ready, and as leaders in our communities, that we are ready. And so I encourage you to participate in the National Service Safety Stand-Down. We have information on our website but you can also go to ready.gov. Ready.gov has a plethora of information on there, everything from plans to tell you some things that you can do, both individual and in the community, to help you be prepared. I can't encourage that enough, the ready.gov, and the participation in the National Service Safety Stand-down.

I'm going to end with just talking about a couple things that we have going on. This November we will be good our third annual ADRT training. AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams. These are existing grantees who have raised their hand and volunteered to say "I want to do something extra," and have made some of their members available to deploy when there's disasters. We're coming together as a group to streamline everything from our reporting to our procedures and policies on the ground so that when they deploy, they really are deploying as one AmeriCorps program, and the point is that our partners on the ground can't tell the difference between Washington Conservation Corps or St. Louis Safety Corps or T-Triple C Hoopa. That it's one AmeriCorps program, we're one family, all with the same mission, and that's to help survivors in recovery and in response.

The next thing that we have planned is this fall we're also going to be doing I think it's our fifth annual or fourth annual Convening for State Commissions. So this is a time where we bring commissions together to really talk about what your role is in the state, in your state emergency plan, and what it could be. I think we have over 25 commissions who are written into the State Emergency Plan. That is really impressive. I would ask those 25, do you know what that means, and I would say that some do and some don't and some are figuring it out, but that's what we want to help you. We want to help you figure that out, and so we encourage you to look for that information on that convening that will be coming, and we hope you will join us.

My staff has a couple sessions that they're doing tomorrow that I want to encourage you to participate in. One is an early morning meeting, for those early risers, to talk about the commissions' role in disaster and also to talk about some of the planning for that convening; and then another midday that's talking about floods and recovery. So I definitely encourage you to attend those, and again I thank you for your time, and have a great symposium. Thank you.

BILL BASL: Our next speaker is Dana Bourne, Director of Grants. Dana?

DANA BOURNE: Hello. As Bill said, I am Dana Bourne. I am the Chief Grants Officer now within the Office of Grants Management for the corporation. I think I'm probably very, very fortunate because I've been on board now for about 16 months, and when I came on board originally, I had the opportunity to be mentored by Peg Rosenberry for 4 months before she went off to Italy for a year. So I had the good fortune to come into an organization that had a solid foundation, a solid commitment, and a strong background in terms of grants management, so I've been extremely fortunate. So what I would like to do a little bit this afternoon is tell you a little bit about the Office of Grants Management, and what we have accomplished in the last year. I will also be giving a grants update on Friday. My staff are also providing a number of trainings over the next couple of days in regards to grants management, monitoring, and internal controls, and I would encourage as many of you as can to participate in some of those trainings.

A little bit about Grants Management – Grants Management, the Office of Grants Management is actually a fairly small organization within the corporation. September is usually one of our busy months, and I just wanted to let you all know that at this point – and we still have about 30 awards to make before next Friday – but to date we’ve made 456 individual awards totaling over \$525 million. So my folks, in collaboration with our program colleagues, have been very, very busy ensuring that we were able to get the money out the door to your organizations as quickly as possible so that you could continue with the work that you’re doing.

In addition to making awards and all the other sort of things that come day-to-day, my staff have really been able to finalize 663 financial reports, 164 draw-down analyses over the years, 28 desk reviews, 26 site visits. Rhonda Honecker and her audit team have recently finalized a draft policy in regards to the indirect cost rate extensions. It is our hope to finalize that very soon in order to give you flexibility in terms of the length of time that the corporation will be able to accept that indirect cost rate. We’ve established over \$3 million in debt, and collected \$2.3 million of that over the last year. We have fully resolved 7 aged audits. Those are audits that had taken a significant amount of time between our colleagues in the Office of the Inspector General, the Corporation, and the Grantee. We’ve all worked very, very closely to clear that backlog. And my staff have provided 70 trainings, those are trainings to organizations, those are trainings to other grants management specialists, and a number of trainings particularly at the regional cluster conferences in regards to financial management.

CHC initially was a function that was in the Office of Grants Management. That function has now been moved over to Lori Giblin and the Office of the Chief Risk Officer, but prior to that moving over, Kinza Ghaznavi, who was the head of that section, and her staff developed a new online criminal history check course. They also got in place the FBI Channeler, which has been I think a significant step for the corporation and for our grantees in ensuring that we comply with the CHC requirements. To date the channeler has completed over 12,000 checks, so we are very, very happy with that, and Kinza and her folks have completed 438 ASPs, Alternate Search Procedure decisions. So they’ve been very, very busy, and in between all of this they are working with you to ensure that your awards are managed appropriately. I will be around for the next 2 days. I would be very interested in speaking with many of you in regards to the services that we provide, what we can provide, what we need to provide to ensure that you’re successful in the implementation of your programs. Thank you.

BILL BASL: Thank you very much, Dana. You should also know that when we moved into the offices we’re in now, that Dana and I made a strategic decision, and that is that our offices would be next to each other and our staff would be, as best we could, adjacent to each other so that program officers and grants officers talk not only officially but bypass each other going from one place to another. So I think that whole decision has been very, very helpful, and hopefully you’ve seen it in a more coordinated approach in terms of how grants and programs works together. So I’d tip my hat to Dana who helped us make all that happen.

Next is Lori Giblin. Lori is our Chief Risk Officer, and I don’t know if we’ve had a chance to have a Chief Risk Officer here speak to you. My sense is we have not. It’s been assumed in other people’s functions. So with that, I’d like to present Lori Giblin, our Chief Risk Officer who is

going to talk about what a risk officer does and what this risk officer will be doing at the Corporation for National and Community Service. Lori?

LORI GIBLIN: Good afternoon. I started with the corporation about 5 months ago, and I had the great opportunity to tell my children, “Yeah, I’m going to be the CRO,” and my son turned to me and said, “Mommy, my favorite animal is the crow.” So I can’t start a job any better than being my son’s favorite animal. So what is the Office of the Chief Risk Officer? Well, it’s a rebranded organization. You may have heard the alphabet soup of OAO or OAM before. It’s a new, upgraded, innovated version of our former monitoring selves, and what it is is it’s an integrated framework of different risk functions, which I’ll talk about in a second, that are designed really to inform management strategically about the risks that we’re facing, both inside the organization and externally with the investments we’re making in you.

So what does that look like? Like I said, we have four components to the organization, two internal. Our Internal Control Office, I think many of you have probably heard about internal controls or have internal control functions within your organization, but internal audit is an important way of self-assessment, whether it’s the form of reconciliation done by your ED or your board, or it’s actually a person who touches transactions to ensure that you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing. It’s an important part of business operations for anyone. I’d encourage you to ensure that you have a strong internal control framework.

And something new to us and new to the government is Enterprise Risk Management. Enterprise Risk Management basically is a way for an organization to better understand risks that it’s facing, both from top-to-bottom, bottom-up, external and internal, and really just getting feedback from all of the stakeholders that are involved in the organization to both identify risk, prioritize them, and then make budget decisions about what to invest in first. We very easily get beguiled by the bright shiny object, or the emergency, or the fire that needs to be put out now, and we forget that there’s that long slug of investing in an organization to fix long-term problems, and I think ERM is supposed to help us focus on that, and we are launching that this year, and in a couple of years come back and ask me how it’s going.

Externally, you may have been poked, comfortably or uncomfortably, by these two functions. Our Compliance function, you’ve most heard about it through the terms [PH] IPERA, Improper Payments, or CHC compliance reviews. For those of you who have questions about any of those programs, I’ll be at the cab stand in about 2 minutes, but if you have any feedback that you’d like to give me to improve the programs, I’ll be right over there. But really, the Compliance function is that I think has gained rigor within the organization, and we’re hoping, and we’ve heard very loudly that we need to be more consistent about it, and it’s a focus for our organization, our team right now.

The other is the Portfolio Risk Assessment process. I’m sure that you all know that we look at each of our grants on an annual basis, and we kind of decide who would require a site visit, whether for good or for bad reasons, opportunities or challenges, but that program is taking an overhaul. We’re going to be looking at together with our friends in the [PH] EDGEs office and with our folks at GAO – the Government Accountability Office has taken an interest in this program – and we’ll be really looking to enhance and revamp that program.

So that's what our risk framework and the components of our program look like. How do we anticipate getting all this done? Well, I'm really hoping to take the forming-storming-norming to just starting out in storming. I think I should start it with storming, hoping to norm and then transform, but this year we're resourcing and really trying to evaluate where we are, how we got to where we are, and how we can improve. So if you're looking for an exciting opportunity in risk management in Washington, D.C., please look at usajobs.gov very soon. I am looking for risk managers far and wide. We're hoping then to move on to a consistent implementation of this program. I think that's the key is continued improvement but consistent implementation, self-evaluation always necessary, tweaking around the edges, but I think folks really need to see some standardization from our shop.

And then really hoping to take that information and enhance our decision-making. As an auditor and an accessor, I think my friends in the ING shop would agree that we really hope that someone's going to take our information and like do something with it. I really do hope that happens. I think the folks at OMB and other parts of the government are also hoping that will happen as well. So I'll check in with you in a few years and let you know how it's going, but I will be over here for those who have good comments, outside for those who have aggressive comments. Thank you.

BILL BASL: Thank you, Lori, and please take Lori up on her offer to ask questions and get information. In my assessment, there's about four laws that were passed recently in the last 6, 7, 8 years that focus on transparency and accountability that affect all of us, and it's really vital that you all understand what those laws are. Just don't refer to them as the boiler plate or extra paperwork. There are critical functions that we all have to live up to around the accountability side of the house, so it's important that we become knowledgeable of what those laws are, what the expectations are, and then how do we comply.

Next, Woody Davis. Woody has the great job of talking to us about information technology, and you know if you've worked with our system, it has its own unique characteristics, we'll just put it that way, and fortunately we have been undergoing a major transformation and really modernizing for the first time, sinking money into modernization to upgrading what you all have to contend with. Believe me, we have to contend with it, too. And so to help explain where we are and where we're going to go, I'd like to introduce Woody Davis. Woody.

WOODY DAVIS: Thank you. I am a geek, I work in IT every day, but guess what? Instead of walking around, chasing Pokémons, things of that nature, I actually am the Program Manager for the IT modernization effort. Thank you. Thank you. All right. So let's talk about this modernization effort. First, for those that don't know, the name of our system is the Grants and Member Management System. It's what's going to replace eGrants, My AmeriCorps Portal, and some performance measure modules. What we've been doing over the last year-and-a-half is modernizing our platforms and business processes used to deliver the grants and member management services. But over the next 3 to 5 years, we're going to pretty busy in building this system and modernizing it for you. Grants Management, and our eGrants system, we're working on that this last year and through this year, FY17. Our Member Management, Data and

Analytics, and Performance Measure Modules – these are all efforts towards building and modernizing.

So for this year, what are our major milestones? First and foremost, get the system completed, and we are working diligently in getting it completed in FY17, so by the end of Q3 we should have a system that's built. But as you know, like most IT things, you just can't build it. You've got to do a lot of stuff with. So that's when we're going to turn to you, get your input, get your feedback. And by the way, we want to thank you for your feedback. It has really helped us ways to improve on what eGrants was and now GMM. So thank you, and a hand to you, everyone, for giving that outside feedback. I think you.

We're going to be moving into user training, and that's you're training, in Q3 and Q4 of FY17, with the goal to go live and cut over to our new system in the first quarter of FY18. So what does it look like? On the left side are two snapshots of our system. First when you log in, you're landing page. The first image in the top left-hand side is where you're going to land. You're going to have information related to things you're working on, things you're engaged in, and an opportunity to create dashboards if you're in a position where you need dashboards to monitor something. Below that is an image of – I think the NOFOs and RFPs. Here is where it's showing what's available in terms of NOFOs and RFPs. Better graphical interface, easy to use, and enhanced capabilities for searching. I know there's a lot of questions about the ability to go in and find things.

So it's modern, mobile friendly with a mobile-friendly user interface, streamlined processes and improved access to data, and that's that search I was referring to earlier. Filtered views and dashboards Improved system-based communication and collaborations – now it's going to be easier really to put attachments into whatever you're doing. More flexible and agile platform – we're going to be able to quickly respond to needs for change. You know, when you go into the system, you may find something that needs to change. Well, because we've invested in a very agile process, we should be able to turn these changes around in a very quick and timely manner.

So what should you expect over FY17 and beyond? Access to a modern IT service and flexible Grants and Member Management system. A phased transition from our current system – you know, we're just not going to turn the lights off one day and turn them on the next day. We really want to do this right and do it gradual over a period of time. Opportunities to provide feedback – so as I mentioned, your feedback is important to us. We have already received some and we want more, so continue providing your feedback on ways to improve on the system. Well-coordinated implementation that fits in with our business cycles – we just don't want to drop a new system in the middle of a major application process, so we're taking that into consideration. Post-implementation period of stabilization and refinement with routine updates – that's that quick, agile updates that I mentioned. We want to be able to, again, hear you, get the input, make the change, and do it in a manner that doesn't cause too much disruption.

So with that said, give us feedback. Here is an email address that we're asking you to use. If you have any ideas, thoughts, concerns, feedback, please send us an email. You'll get a quick response from our team, and we take a lot of steps in ensuring that we take every feedback,

address it, look at it, and find out how it can fit into our system. I think that's all I have. That's all I had, so thank you very much.

BILL BASL: Thanks, Woody. You need to know, too, that this is a long process to convert a system that was built, quite frankly, 22 years ago, and that's what the system is that we're working off of, that legacy system from many, many years ago. So one of the challenges that we have is to go forward, and so we ask for your patience and support, and as Woody said, input on how we can make this better. This could only happen with a major commitment by Wendy to make sure our IT system is modernized. We just can't continue to be where we are, so we've made some major financial investments to make this happen. So Woody, thank you, and thank you for your staff to kind of keep this going.

Next is Ted Miller. Ted is the Director of the Office of External Affairs. Many of you have seen Ted. He was at all of the, I believe, cluster meetings and regional trainings this year and the year before, and he's going to share with us some exciting events that the Office of External Affairs is going to be working on now and in the very, very near future. Ted?

TED MILLER: Thank you very much, Bill. It's great to see everyone this afternoon. As Bill said, I had the opportunity to meet folks at the regional convenings, and it's so nice to see everyone from across the country in one room. So the Office of External Affairs, part of my job is to continue to repeat the same message over and over again until people can really repeat it back to me in the same way that I'm saying it. So I always open up every presentation by saying that the charge of the Office of External Affairs is two-fold. We are in charge of how the outside world sees our programs, and we hope that one of two things happen when they have some experience with AmeriCorps or other National Service programs.

One, if they're like us and they already know who we are or are a part of our network, that we strengthen that relationship, that we've forged an even stronger bond, that they're even more excited or proud to be a part of AmeriCorps and the greater National Service community. The other audience we're trying to reach is the group of people who do not know anything about us, and what we hope we are doing in the Office of External Affairs, in partnership with you out in the field, is that we're creating the kind of content that's compelling, the kind of content that invites them into the National Service community. And at the end of the day, the way we measure our success and our effectiveness is that we can say that there were more people who care about what each of you does than there were the year before. So in a nutshell, that's what we're here to do and help to provide to the AmeriCorps community.

I'm going to throw some numbers at you today – some will be impressive, I hope – but I think that hopefully you'll walk away with really two main points. One is that together, we can really move the needle in a very positive direction, that if we are on the same page, if we're operating on the same set of standards and branding and messaging, that we're really unstoppable, that we have an amazing network of people out there, incredible AmeriCorps members as our ambassadors, that we can really advance the cause of National Service in a way that, again, makes more people care about what we do.

And secondly, we're going to talk about a big milestone moment that's coming up in the next months or so. Milestone moments are about marking what we've achieved, but more importantly I think forecasting what the future looks like for AmeriCorps. So let's take a look, you see the Magic of Metrics, the little alliteration there for the afternoon, then we're going to go over and we're going to talk to you about what the outside world has seen from us in the months of March to September.

So let's start with some big numbers over here. So you can see on the left of that slide, you've got the traditional news, the tablets, the computer, and the newspaper – all together in the course of that period there were about 14,000 news clips about National Service in that time, so about 14,000. All together that's added up to about 950 billion impressions. That means that's how many people have seen, at some point, how many times references to National Service or to AmeriCorps have come across sort of traditional newswires. You see over there some of our digital engagement as well. I'll share some of those numbers later on.

So let's go to this next slide, it's one of my favorites, it really shows the impact. I'll just give you a couple of seconds to look at that. If you can remember, I think the slides really tell a very compelling story. If you start here from my left, as I see, with AmeriCorps Week and Grandma Virginia, because we integrated this with the across all National Service programs to see what the outside world was seeing. AmeriCorps Week, Grandma Virginia, she was the Senior Corps Foster Grandparent volunteer who met the President and First Lady, and then appeared on every single news show on earth for the next two months, and she was coming sort of down on her end in March in terms of her media frenzy, but that coincided with AmeriCorps Week.

Then you see Mayors Day, obviously big moment in terms of the National Service community collectively working together to get attention at Senior Corps Week. And then I know we have – I see Heather from West Virginia – we have the AmeriCorps Grants that were announced in and around June, throughout the month of June, and we also had the West Virginia floods. And then you look next, you've got the top 10 AmeriCorps – and we'll talk a little bit more about that – the AmeriCorps cities and states, and the Louisiana floods. Let's talk about those for a moment.

We know that we always say that AmeriCorps is there long past after the news media leaves, and you can say that for sure in Louisiana. It's a big struggle. We're there early on, and in some of the initial news coverage when people are talking about the response to a natural disaster, and then then secondly is that we are also obligated to continue to tell that story once the cameras have left. I think in terms of West Virginia and Louisiana, we worked really closely with the State Service Commissions, and Kelly DeGraff and her team, to really make sure that people understood in that moment what it meant for AmeriCorps members to be on the ground in those communities, and I think the results show right there – we don't do it to get a spike in coverage, we do it because it's the right thing to do – but at the end of the day it's an opportunity for people to learn more about AmeriCorps and the benefit that we bring to communities. And then you see 9/11, in the early parts of September you see the needle moving fairly high on that day of service.

There's a very subtle picture – AmeriCorps A on a radio. So Bill doesn't even know these numbers yet but he's part of the reason we get to share these figures. So how many of you

represent a state or a city that was in the AmeriCorps top 10? Actually make some noise here, like hooray, you're in the top 10. All right. All right, yes, yes, yes. Those of you who were not, that okay, next year, next year. The reason why we do this. We don't do the top 10 to exclude the other 40 states or others that are not in that list. It's really a big opportunity for us to use some of the data we have at CNCS to tell the story about AmeriCorps, and let me tell you some of the numbers behind that. For one day, Bill stood, it was involved with our External Affairs Team, and did 26 interviews with radio stations in 16 different markets across the country. All together he reached an audience of 14.9 million listeners over the course of just that day. In addition, the clips of his radio interviews about AmeriCorps ran about 2,700 times over the course of the next following weeks, so people heard again and again and again about the impact of AmeriCorps in their community. One, we hope they took away the fact that they were in the top 10, whether they were a city or a state; and two, they learned a lot about what AmeriCorps was doing in their communities. And though you may not be in a top 10 AmeriCorps city or state, we all benefit when the discussion about AmeriCorps is taking place. So that's 14.9 million listeners, not bad.

Now we transfer into the digital world, and just a little bit here. We know that we do a lot of hashtags, who doesn't, it's a hashtag nation, we get that. So if you look at this, the numbers here, our hashtags – whether it's AmeriCorps works or some others that we've used – have been used about 300,000 times just since March to September, so not a bad number. You guys are doing a really good job of that consistency, and we understand why that's important. We're able to track the conversation that's going on digitally, and able to better understand the story that's being told about AmeriCorps and other National Service programs.

As we go into this next slide, we're looking at some top-performing content. Now there you have two – you have the 9/11 period there in the middle, that's pretty traditional, tying AmeriCorps into that National Day of Service, and then you have the Louisiana floods. Those did very well on our social media channels, which is fantastic. The one that's over there that does not look familiar – one of these is not like the other, if that's what you're trying to look – is the Tasty Cake video. Last year when I spoke to this group, I don't think I said that one of our big objectives digitally was to create a Tasty Cake video. The reason I tell this story is not just because it got nearly 200,000 views organically. It's that it was a way for us to look at the conversation that was going on digitally, and how people were telling their stories.

How many here have any recollection of having seen that video? Okay, fantastic. How many of you – this is the true question – how many of you saw it on the feed of a friend's social media channel, someone who's not typically associated with AmeriCorps or National Service? Okay, quite a few. That's fairly good, actually. But somehow we got way out there on this one. The reason we did it is because you have to follow where the conversation is going and sort of be in part of that dialogue, and it's not necessarily that we were thinking about baking a cake and how to tie it into to being in AmeriCorps, and what the ingredients are of a successful AmeriCorps member, but that's the way that we kind of look at what's out there digitally and come up with creative ways to put that all together. So that's one of the success stories we have over the last year.

Let's go to this slide. Now, for the 45th time you've probably heard today, we are going to induct the one millionth AmeriCorps member on October 7th, in a little under a month. This is where we

get, as you can see right now, the content for this is doing very well. This is a huge moment for us. We're really forging an even stronger bond with those who are familiar with the AmeriCorps program, and hopefully inviting more people in to our community. One of the things that Wendy and Bill talked about earlier today was the importance of National Service, and I just want to just thanks to all of you who have worked at your state level to recruit and get more employers of National Service. We're now at more than 400 organizations that represent 2.3 million jobs. That's one of the best validators in terms of recruiting AmeriCorps members or talking about the AmeriCorps experiences, that you have more than 400 organizations, from Fortune 500 companies to small business to nonprofits, and what they are saying is that they want people who have the skills and background and team management that comes with the AmeriCorps experience.

One of the things that we're going to make available to you as we celebrate the one millionth member is that we are going to send videos and other collateral that you can play at your events that really reinforce among the incoming members of AmeriCorps the value, that not only are they one of one million now and part of a huge network but there are a lot of people who want them to work for their companies. So the video I'm going to show you in a couple of seconds comes from David L. Cohen. He is the Senior Executive Vice President of Comcast NBCUniversal, and that companies Chief Diversity Officer.

The Employers of National Service was announced on the South Lawn of the White House on the 20th anniversary of AmeriCorps, and Comcast NBCUniversal was one of the 5 original employers for National Service. So it's fantastic that David agreed to deliver a message that is directed at all of the incoming members of the One of One Million Class of AmeriCorps, so let's turn to that video and I think that will close out the presentation because I think David says what it means to be in AmeriCorps better than anybody else.

As we make that little bit of a transition into David Cohen, I just want to say to all of you, we now have on our list of events for October 7th – we know some of you are having swearing-in events that are not coincided with October 7th, that's fine. October 7th is the digital day where we're really trying to make that big impact. We so far have events for 31 states so far, so if you have not been able to send us the information about your state, please send that to 1of1million@cns.gov. Again, that's 1of1million@cns.gov. And we have David, right? All right, there we go! David, take it away!

[video]

DAVID L. COHEN: Hello. My name is David L. Cohen, and I am Senior Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Comcast Corporation. On behalf of all of us at Comcast NBCUniversal, we congratulate AmeriCorps for reaching the one million member mark. We know that AmeriCorps members like you get things done for cities across America. Every day you are out there helping students succeed in the classroom, and strengthening communities by addressing key issues like hunger, housing, and the digital divide.

We are proud to support your service and grateful for your commitment. In fact, Comcast NBCUniversal values the skills AmeriCorps members gain through their service, and that is why

we are proud to be an Employer of National Service. We know that making substantive change is hard work and requires all of us working together from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. That's why we joined Employers of National Service, so that we can support dedicated, passionate AmeriCorps members like you. So after you complete your AmeriCorps service, please check out our career opportunities website, and make sure to let us know that you served in AmeriCorps. All of us at Comcast NBCUniversal wish you the best in the coming year.

[end of video]

BILL BASL: Thank you, Ted, Now bringing up our final speaker is Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi. You've all heard the saying, "We stand on the shoulders of others." So before Jennifer came to this position, she was at least 5'10", and for all of the AmeriCorps grief at times, for all of the challenges, for building a document and building a movement around responding to a document that's much more efficient, much more streamlined, takes a lot of personal courage. It takes a lot of stick-with-it-ness to make that happen because there's a lot of processes that go on in the government process to review what is really a legal document. And so today, she is going to share with you some of the insights for this document this year, but you need to know there is no stronger advocate for the work you do and how you have to put that work together in a NOFO that meets all the compliance than Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi, the Deputy of AmeriCorps State and National. Jennifer?

JENNIFER BASTRESS TAHMASEBI: I was taller, okay. So before joining the corporation – I also don't like this acrylic panel – I was part of a team that ran an AmeriCorps program, so I was an AmeriCorps grantee, so I was on the other side of the equation as an applicant. So we would write the application, we would light some candles, and then we would over-analyze every word, every breath, every pause of our PO during our monthly check-ins between when we submitted it and when we heard the news, and we also asked multiple inappropriate leading questions in hopes that she would crack and tell us something. She never did, which was unfortunate but, you know, then we would get the news, and I think it would be relief if we got funded, and then you would sort of wonder, we got funded by how much? Were we rock stars or did we squeak by?

And then the year that we didn't get funded – because, frankly, we dialed it in and wrote an application that was very response to the notice of 3 years ago when we applied – we wanted to know why we weren't funded, and how we were in comparison to other people that were funded and weren't funded, and I think a lot of the questions we had, while we appreciated all the feedback, we often wondered, you know, what are the program officers talking? What are they seeing? What are the trends related to the applications that are coming in? And if we could get a PO to tell us after the grant process what they saw, to improve our applications, both for people that are competing in a future year as well as the people that actually were funded, many of which are you all, what would we have been able to tell? So I have some musings from the AmeriCorps State and National Team for the FY16 grant review process, so five things that are for National Directs and also for our partners in grant-making, the State Commissions, as you support people that are applying in the new process.

So the first one, you know, people talk about goals and like stretch goals or reach goals. This one is just a goal because I feel we can accomplish this. It is about page limits. Most of you all got this right and have been able to count to 15 or 18, and we appreciate that. Some of you are the few, the proud, those that did not get it right. Some of you were half a page over, and some of you submitted applications that were 37 pages long. You know who you are and, -- well, you don't, you're not here -- but I'm just saying. So I just, please people, I really feel that we can conquer this in FY17. Print out the application, the cover sheet or the 424, if I'm being pointy-headed and bureaucrat, and a portion of the narrative. Create the page limit. Print it out per the directions of the NOFO, not the creative way in which you'd like to print it out, per the way we tell you in the NOFO, and count it, and we feel that this can be something that we can overcome and never talk about again. That is my dream.

The second thing that we want to talk about is the Theory of Change in the Logic Model section. So many of you have holistic approaches to service that you do with communities. We value and appreciate that type of approach. We have found that that didn't always show up in applications as effectively as it does in the communities in which you serve. We saw a fair amount of applications where one intervention was clearly described and the remaining interventions were not. Some of the interventions were so poorly described that we didn't understand what the AmeriCorps members were doing. If you have more than one intervention, which is fine, all of the interventions need to be described with the same level of detail. So just an example is, you know, two well-described interventions about literacy gains and then one poorly-described intervention about numeracy gains will bring the overall rating for that section down.

I also want to preempt a conversation that's internal, that some of you are currently having in your heads, I am confident, so that we don't get this twisted. CNCS wants to fund and does fund nuanced and complicated interventions. We know that sometimes that is the only way that change occurs in communities. Your program officers who review these applications know this, and the reason that they know this is many of them have implemented and/or run programs with holistic approaches to the challenges in communities. That said, we need the effectiveness of your theory of change and the program design to show up in the four corners on the page in the applications. Help us help you by clearly describing all the interventions you seek to highlight in your applications, and you can do this within the page limits. We saw that multiple times in applications. We didn't see it in the one that was 37 pages, strangely, but you really can do this within the page limit. It's not a barrier.

I think the other thing that we saw in the Theory of Change Logic Model section was the addition of an intervention that involved a tiny number of members that were generally focused on something that was a NOFO priority. These seemed somewhat random because they were not generally the core business of the applicant. While these interventions were potentially well thought-out, they were not well developed or described within the four corners of the application, and that also brought the overall rating for that section down. So while we appreciate people being responsive to the priorities in the Notice, adding it just because you think it's going to get you a leg up -- if you choose to do that, that's great, but you have to describe the interventions otherwise it will drag the entire rating of that section down.

The third thing that I want to talk about is something near and dear to all of our hearts – performance measures. It is, I know it is, deep inside for all of you. I think we can agree that all performance measures – performance measures are a large part of the clarification process. In fact for some applicants, those were the only clarification questions that we asked. We believe that that doesn't have to be the case for FY17. This year we released the NOFO publicly on August 15th. Your applications are due to us, meaning for State Commissions, your subs are due probably before January 18th, so that's 5 months that were or are available to work on your application. The clarification period, although we lengthened it and doubled it this year, is 2 weeks, so 5 months, 4 months, 3 months is a much longer time to work on your performance measures than the 2 weeks of clarification. So we really encourage you to look at the Performance Measure Checklist, to review the copious guidance that we provided, it is a lot of guidance, and really work on the performance measures so that you don't have to spend the time in the 2 weeks of the clarification period.

The fourth thing that we saw was related to the Needs section. We want to raise something that's been present for years but seemed to reach a fever pitch in this year's grant review process. We saw a fair amount of Needs sections that only provided racial demographics. Providing information that a community is 75% or 90% Asian American, Latino, Native American, or African American does not document need. It tells us nothing about the need or the problem your program is trying to solve, and thus the applicants that provided that alone received a low rating in that section. Substituting race for actual documentation of need or challenge in a community is misguided, and it occasionally points to some serious confusion on the part of the applicant. It does not convey what we assume is the thoughtful nature in which programs operate in and are a part of the communities they seek to serve.

Are we saying that racial demographics don't matter at large? That is not what we're saying at all. What we're saying is as it specifically relates to the Needs section. If it is relevant and you can connect it, it's appropriate to include in the Needs section. For example, if a program is focused on serving people with sickle cell anemia, a disease that is disproportionately affecting people that are African American, then stating that information followed by the racial breakdown of African Americans in the community you seek to serve makes sense. Saying that you were focused on literacy gains and then simply stating how many Asian Americans there in a community does not document need.

The fifth thing that we want to focus on for next year is the information you send us related to your evidence level. We got off to a little bit of a slow start with the evidence level but you all have really embraced this and sent us a lot of great information. There is some component of you all that have embraced it potentially too much or in a way that it is a bit peculiar. We really want you all to send us only what we list in the NOFO, and only information related to the evidence basis of what you are actually doing. We receive a lot of evidence information that potentially appears that you did a Google search and got documents and just sent it in to us. We received a very lovely report from one application, who is also not here, about therapeutic writing and how there are benefits to that, which would have been awesome except for they had nothing in their program design about therapeutic writing. So we really want to encourage people that focused information is better and definitely sets you up for more success than sending us as many studies

that you can find that may or may not have some tangential relationship to what you are asking us to invest in.

So that's our feedback from FY16. For FY17, I just wanted to highlight a couple of things that have changed. The first is the Notification for Intent to Apply. It is no longer mandatory, it is strongly encouraged. We want to fund the best strategies out in the world that strengthen communities, and we want that to be driven by what comes in to us, not what comes in to us before the Intent to Apply deadline is set. I've also heard some feedback from people about "What does this mean, it's not mandatory?" What it means is it's not mandatory. "What will happen to us if we don't submit it?" Nothing because it's not mandatory. But we do strongly encourage you to send it to us because it helps us plan for how many applications will come in. Again, the goal of making it not mandatory is really to have as many options as possible for us in terms of investing in communities.

The second thing I want to talk about is the Notice Priorities. As you have heard prior to me speaking, we expanded the Safer Communities priority to include Law Enforcement and Community Partnerships and Civil Unrest. We have added a Healthy Futures priority with the Opioid and Prescription Drug Crisis. You will notice in the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance – which replaced the less clunky term of Glossary, but it needs to legally be Mandatory Supplemental Guidance, or as we like to call it MSG. I especially like that, ah, for obvious reasons. Okay. But you will notice in the description of the Opioid and Prescription Drug Crisis that it is very vague. That is on purpose, not because we were lazy or slow, but because we literally want to throw it open to you all to tell us what is the best way that National Service can be a change-maker in that space.

We also are introducing an Evidence-Based Intervention Planning Grants. These grants will be made with non-AmeriCorps State and National grant funds, so they will not take away from the larger pool of funds, but it is an effort for us to expand the tent of program designs and organizations that haven't previously been a part of the AmeriCorps family. So we are looking for evidence-based interventions that are potentially happening somewhere else out in the world, but then could be brought into the AmeriCorps family and they could use some time to plan what that would look like. We have moved up from something that we are strongly excited about to something that is a priority – Encore Programming. So we hope that this will drive more organizations to come in and be a part of the work that we're doing.

I think the largest change that we're going to see actually has to do with the process of how we review grants. As you guys know, for years we have done a two-phase process where the first phase was a review of the need, the theory of change, the logic model, and then if it was successful in that component, it moved on for a full read of the entire application. This year we are doing not a two-phase but a one-phase – which is I guess not a phase, it's just a review – of your applications, and this has come about as a result of the AmeriCorps State and National staff really advocating to read the entire application, all the applications that come in, and that's out of respect for the time and energy that applicants that put in into writing the application, and the severity of the challenges in communities, and an acknowledgement of the fact that while there is a structure that is well-documented in the NOFO when and where we'd like you to talk about things, some of the applicants – some of whom are in the room – have been creative with

their approach to that, and have chosen to sprinkle the need throughout the application and not just in the Need section. So in an acknowledgement of that, we really wanted to give a fair read to all applications that came in, so we are going to give this a whirl and see how it goes. I think the only thing that frightens me is if we have a huge amount of applications that come in, but we are committed to this – and I am getting flagged down for time. So thank you.

BILL BASL: I asked Jennifer if she would do a quick duet with me, so this is the challenge of starting the application an hour before it's due, and we also hear from folks, "Well, we started this a long time ago." We can see you, we know when the application was started. It's kind of like the dog ate the homework. I mean, we know when you started the application. So in spite of Woody's best efforts, we have a bulky system. You all should know about eGrants, what a challenge it is to work with, so please start early, please practice, please – and if there are legitimate issues, because everyone tries to get it in, they said they've worked on it 3 weeks before, and an hour before it's due, "I can't get it," and everyone's in a panic.

There is a process for doing it, a process for documenting that you tried, there's a timestamp that we see, and I just mention that because this becomes a legal issue as to how or when we use discretion to accept applications that come in after the deadline, and can't tell you how many of these issues I've had to sit in on because of individuals not going through the process that's laid out. So it's there. We all know we have a very imperfect eGrant system, and so please for all of us start early, and if there is an issue please document that process, and there is a way to do that.

With that we're going to conclude and wrap it up. Thank you for your attention. Thanks for participating. All of my colleagues on this panel will be around here, they're very approachable. Please step forward, ask them questions. Thank you, above all, for being with us today.