

**AmeriCorp State and National Symposium 2016**  
**September 21-23, 2016, Alexandria, VA**  
**Closing Plenary and Symposium Wrap-up**  
**Friday, 9/23 11:00am – 12:30pm**

**Transcription**

**PRESENTER:** Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage Bill Basl and Wendy Spencer!

**WENDY SPENCER:** We beat'em to the music. They didn't get to see us dance, which I know is why y'all came.

**BILL BASL:** Thank you all, and good morning. Please come in. There's plenty of seats up front, the view is great up here, so if you want to come up from the back, you're more than welcome. Well, good morning. Thanks for being with us. We want to thank you all for participating in this 2016 AmeriCorps Symposium. We hope that it meets all of your needs, but there are ways of providing feedback, and hopefully you will do that through the app and provide feedback that way, or there are some old-school ways also of providing some written comments, and you can always send information back to us.

We wanted to spend a little bit of time summarizing some of the key points that came up either in the general sessions or in the workshop sessions, and kind of go through those very quickly. The first thing we think that we should be looking at together is this whole issue of recruiting, how do we recruit for AmeriCorps, how do we get the word out about individuals who want to serve. And so I've been thinking a little bit about this, I want to share some quick thoughts, and then we'll kind of move on. First of all, in terms of recruiting, how do we promote recruitment in a way that where we share the applicant pool? If we have multiple applicants for one position, are there ways that we can share that with others who are looking for members?

So specifically I'm thinking of adopting what I would call a positive referral protocol. How's that for a government label? A positive referral protocol, and what I mean by that is we take some responsibility. People want to serve our country, and maybe there are multiple people who apply for one or two positions – I think we should take the responsibility of helping them find another position in some other program or some other organization so that they can also serve. I've heard, I've talked to folks from Ohio who talk about this idea where they have called individual organizations that have openings and say, "We have a good two or three applicants, would you like to interview them?" And then we send the applicant to that organization where they already know they're going to be interviewed. – But adopting this positive protocol to keep people on the move in terms of finding a positive AmeriCorps experience. So that's recruiting!

**WENDY SPENCER:** All right! So even to continue the recruiting, we talked about how housing, finding a solution for affordable housing or partnership in housing would really help

recruiting because if we can overcome that one obstacle to service, parents would be happy about their youths signing up for AmeriCorps, and individuals would be able to participate that may not be able to without that support. So think about this creatively, think about in your states, what kind of housing partnerships. You heard me say that the Eli Segal fellow is going to be focused on this. He's going to be coming up with a toolkit of best practices and innovative new ways. We'll be reaching out to all of you and asking you for some of your solutions. There are some amazing solutions, everything from having sort of a portal and bank to have your own members room together, to some of the programs have actually bought houses for their AmeriCorps members to bunk up in during their time. That's a real creative solution.

And I thought about this yesterday. I thought wouldn't it be great if we had an AmeriCorps housing app that if you were in AmeriCorps member and about to sign up, that you could put the zip code of the location you were going to serve in or the name of the city you were going to serve in, and up would populate all of the AmeriCorps members looking for roommates? Technically, all of these AmeriCorps members have already been screened because they've had their criminal history checks done, right, on time every time, and so it would sort of already be – you'd have a trust factor in these strangers that they're going to meet, and it could be for any program. It could be for AmeriCorps, heck, even Senior Corps could welcome and provide support, and Bill even said maybe there could even be a Senior Corp/AmeriCorps partnership where seniors would allow someone to rent a room at a low cost in exchange for maybe running a few errands for them once a week.

I think we have to be creative and think about new ways to compete with the growing economy, which is a great thing, but find ways for many, many Americans to be able to serve in AmeriCorps and not make it a burden on them but an experience that they look for and want to do. Remember Up With People? Do you all remember that, Up With People? Are they still around? They're not around anymore, which I hate that. Were they started in Arizona, Bob? He would know this. I remember we used to host Up With People students every year, they came through our community, and I loved doing that. So I think we should have an Up With AmeriCorps People sort of program where we could host them and find places to host them. So housing should be a priority, we'll make it a priority, we'll work with you, and I hope you'll be thinking about creative ways to provide this resource for AmeriCorps members also.

**BILL BASL:** So after we recruit and house these AmeriCorps members, we have to have a great opening day for them, and so October 7<sup>th</sup> this year is not only a day to open and celebrate all those who serve but it's a milestone. It's a one million milestone, if you will. And so this year, although we have information from about 20 or so states in terms of the activity that's going to take place, we'd like to hear from everybody, and really I think that to make October 7<sup>th</sup> special, can we figure out a way to do an event in every state on October 7<sup>th</sup>? – And an even can be just 2 or 3 members or 4 members, maybe they gather at a commission office or a program office, and virtually tie that in. Let people know that in every state, there are people recognizing those who serve, and recognizing those by having them issue the Oath of Service to everyone in every state, that during October 7<sup>th</sup>, everyone will be recognized at events taking place around the country.

**WENDY SPENCER:** And we have 30 states that have not let us know yet if you've got an activity in your state, so look for External Affairs to reach out to you, also reach out to your program officer, whether you're a national direct program or a commission or just any program under any grant. Please let us know if you can host something. Even if you're planning a large ceremony in November, maybe you could do something small as a preview in your state. And I actually am asking those programs that would like to to invite your Senior Corps volunteers who are in your community as well. We have a Senior Corps Pledge now. These seniors love it. It is so touching to issue the Senior Corps Pledge, and if you've got room, invite them to participate. It is AmeriCorps Opening Day, but our sisters and brothers in service and our Senior Corps programs can participate if it's an opportunity that you can facilitate as well.

So think about November 11<sup>th</sup>, what is November 11<sup>th</sup>? Veterans Day, very good, you passed. It is also National Vet Corps Day, and this is the pinning ceremony that we started last year. One of my most memorable, memorable experiences has been pinning veterans, young and old, and thanking them for their service, and also pinning those AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers who are serving veterans as a part of their mission during their year of service. We have a new pin that's coming out very soon. I think we'll be reaching out to you so you can order those. The inaugural pins were very special. This pin will look a little different, not quite as fancy because it is a budget, but it will be something they'll be proud of to wear, so we hope that we can hear from you on Veterans Day, or certainly if not that day during that week, to honor veterans who are serving in our programs and those who are serving veterans and military family members. So we're all in on Veterans Day, right? Awesome, very good, right.

**BILL BASL:** One of the most important responsibilities we have towards AmeriCorps members is to ensure their health and safety as they serve throughout locations throughout the country, and so this September, September 30<sup>th</sup>, September being National Preparedness Month, September 30<sup>th</sup> is again our National Safety Stand-Down, and opportunity for all of us to look at ways that not only members who are serving on the work site are working in a safe condition and follow safety practices, but also ensuring that to the degree that we can, members who are serving during their off hours understand what some of the protocols are, understand what operating and being and recreating in a safe way, what does that all mean. It's important because oftentimes we have members who come to locations from other parts of the country. They don't know situations, they don't know perhaps the hidden dangers that everyone else knows but they don't know. So it's an important time to reflect and let folks know that it's important to look out for each other, to care for each other, and it's important for us to inform our members about how to function and perform in a safe manner as they work through their service commitment.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Thanks, Bill. So how many of you have had a flood or a tornado or any kind of disaster this year in your states? Holler out some of the states for me. West Virginia, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas, Louisiana, South Carolina, others? Indiana. Wow, there have been a lot of disasters this year that need our help. The most widespread one affecting the most people is certainly Louisiana. But I really hope that in all of your programs all the time, you'll be thinking about ways to support those communities who have been impacted. These disasters impact people for months, months, and months, and sometimes years, so I really encourage you to always think about this, and when there are opportunities for special days of service or other things, think about either raising money or donated items, but not used clothing. Do you

remember what the best use of used clothing is? It's to have a garage sale, a yard sale, and raise money, and donate it to the charity of your choice. Excellent. Ooh, that's a great mission.

But I do think even with South Carolina and Texas, I mean there are so many that have had horrific incidences, Louisiana does top everyone in the number of people affected, so I hope that you will reach out to Judd and the state commission, will reach out to us and let us know if there is something that you can do to help these citizens. Tens of thousands lost everything, and I mean washers and dryers, microwaves, furniture, small appliances, everything, rugs. I mean, you just try to think about all they lost, and I hope that this country can rally around them and help replenish those items lost for those who can't afford to buy new ones, or maybe were not insured or under-insured, which unfortunately there are a lot.

Bill, I think we're doing a best wishes or a thank-you note for AmeriCorps members who are currently serving in Louisiana. If you want to write a small note to an AmeriCorps, just leave it on the table before you leave, we'll pick those up, and Beth Binkley is going down as part of a disaster cadre in a couple of days or a week or so, and she'll deliver those to some of the AmeriCorps members who are sleeping in these gymnasiums, and some of them taking ride-along showers. You remember that one from the first day? If you weren't here the first day, you don't know what that joke is, and I'm not going to share it with you. But anyway, I think they would really appreciate a greeting from you, and just to say who you are and where you're from. Thank you.

**BILL BASL:** So how many of you here have employed an AmeriCorps Alum either in your commission or national direct organization?

**WENDY SPENCER:** Yeah!

**BILL BASL:** Look at those hands!

**WENDY SPENCER:** AmeriCorps Alums in the house!

**BILL BASL:** So with all those hands that are raised, how many of you are an Employer of National Service?

**WENDY SPENCER:** Good, officially!

**BILL BASL:** Very good! So the goal here is to get all the hands up, and so one of the things that was done and announced by President Obama almost two years ago now was putting this idea forward of finding employers who would make an affirmative step forward to employ people who have served our country in AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps. So one of the great ways we can do that is through in commissions, everyone who serves on a commission, who serves on your board, is there a way that they can reach out and recruit individuals from their organization who would help make the positive statement and go through the very quick process of become an Employer of National Service. Our goal is to have at least 500 companies and organizations be part of this esteemed group of organizations.

So I think we can accomplish that goal, 500 in 3 months. The idea here is to promote this idea of the skill sets that AmeriCorps members acquire during their year or two years of service are the exact skill sets many employers are seeking, so it's a way to also connect employers who are looking for quality individuals to join their workforce, and it's a way to show AmeriCorps members how a year of service or two years of service prepares them even better to be competitive in the workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So working together to look at ways of bringing more and more employers to the Employers of National Service is the number one goal for us the next 3 months.

**WENDY SPENCER:** That's great. You know, another way to increase our recruitment for AmeriCorps members and to provide a benefit that will reduce student debt is to have more colleges and universities matching the Eli Segal Education Award. We have 184 matching it now, but that should be hundreds. So I'm going to make a pitch today. We've got several hundred people here in D.C. at [PH] Gallaudet University, and we're going to announce the honor roll recipients for this year's Education Awards for Service for Universities, and I'm going to pitch to that crowd to match the Education Award this afternoon. But please go back to your states, ask your commissioners, ask your board members of your programs that the nonprofits are serving with to connect and reach out to universities and colleges, and ask them to match the Education Award, or maybe set aside a couple of scholarships a year for AmeriCorps members to apply for or to qualify for. This can really help recruitment as we get this message out, and it can help reduce college debt which is such, such a large problem in America. So help us with that. I think that's a great goal for all of us to have.

**BILL BASL:** So as we're rising to a conclusion here, I wanted to do one quick thing and recognize all the folks who helped put this symposium together. I can see Barbara Reynolds back there, and if you could help me to salute Barbara!

**WENDY SPENCER:** Yay, Barbara!

**BILL BASL:** Barbara, and all the National Service staff, the Corporation for National Service, our program officers at AmeriCorps State and National, and others from the Corporation, could you wave your hand because everyone has been either a workshop coordinator or a presenter, someone.

**WENDY SPENCER:** All right!

**BILL BASL:** Thank you very much, and all those who helped plan, all of you who provided input in terms of what these workshops, what the general sessions, what the topics should be, thank you for making this such a worthwhile event.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So we've got something fun to close with. Matt Guinan and our External Affairs Office has been sneaking around the conference for the last couple of days and interviewing a few of you to get your thoughts, and if we're ready we'll roll the tape. It's coming, anticipation is building!

[audio recording]

**DEBBIE SCHUFFENHAUER:** Debbie Schuffenhauer from Serve Washington. This year we have more than 1,300 AmeriCorps members serving in Washington State.

**EMILY STEINBERG:** I'm Emily Steinberg from OneStar Foundation in Austin, Texas. Collectively we have over 2,400 AmeriCorps members serving in the State of Texas.

**DAVID GRIFFIN:** I'm David Griffin, I'm with the Corps Network. We're a national association of conservation and service corps here in Washington, D.C., and we're proud to have over 3,500 AmeriCorps members this year.

**KAREN BAKER:** I'm Karen Baker and I'm with California Volunteers where we have close to 4,000 AmeriCorps members serving.

**JENNIFER JONES:** My name is Jennifer Jones, I'm with Serve Colorado, and our commission has over 1,100 members serving in our state.

**JENNA HOLMES:** Hi, I'm Jenna Holmes, I'm with the Michigan Community Service Commission, and we have about 1,000 members serving in Michigan.

**ALICE SAZINSKY:** I'm Alice Sazinsky with Habitat for Humanity out of Atlanta, Georgia. We have 450 AmeriCorps members tackling affordable housing across the United States of America this year.

**CAT KEEN:** My name Cat Keen, I serve with Volunteer Florida where we have approximately 1,400 AmeriCorps members serving throughout the State of Florida.

**FEMALE:** This year, 275 AmeriCorps members will serve with City Square AmeriCorps to improve food security, job security, and housing across Dallas and Houston.

**MALE:** AmeriCorps members are working on promoting environmental stewardship and kind of tackling a lot of America's environmental problems, so we're improving public lands, and maintaining sheds and waterways, and collecting recycling and trash.

**FEMALE:** Justice Corps out in California has over 300 AmeriCorps members that are working in our California courts, increasing access to justice.

**FEMALE:** Of those members, 150 members are serving in the Washington Reading Course to support our state's struggling leaders.

**FEMALE:** AmeriCorps Branches is an amazing program targeting mentoring and youth services throughout Miami-Dade County.

**FEMALE:** Our AmeriCorps members are tackling one of our greatest needs in the state which is K-12 success. Our members are members are serving over 11,000 students by tutoring and mentoring them.

**FEMALE:** Our members are going to be serving 5,000 individuals and helping them to attain strength, self-reliance, and stability through shelter.

**FEMALE:** So the AmeriCorps members serving in our Urban Safety Corps Program in Detroit is having tremendous results throughout the city. The AmeriCorps members are serving throughout their community, building block clubs, building trust, building that whole community spirit that exists to be able to transform lives, both their own as well as their community. They're reducing violence and increasing safety, and bringing the community together to truly care about Detroit.

**FEMALE:** We are so proud that our AmeriCorps Texas members are...

**MALE:** 1 of 1 million

**FEMALE:** Are 1 of 1 million

**FEMALE:** I'm proud that our AmeriCorps members are 1 of 1 million.

[end of audio]

**WENDY SPENCER:** Isn't that great? It's really great. So that was really great, thanks for all of you that interviewed. So this is the last time that Bill and I will be on this stage in our roles, and we just can't thank you enough for giving us the joy of our lives to serve over the last 4 years. This has been an amazing, amazing run and journey, and there's so many milestones that you have accomplished, and we feel like we've been right there with you every step of the way, and it has really, really been a memorable, memorable time for us, and we hope that you feel that you have been successful in lifting up AmeriCorps State Commissions, your individual programs in your communities and your states and your regions because we see it from the big picture, and it is really truly amazing, the impact that you as leaders of the National Service field have had on people's lives, on environments, and communities. So thank you for giving us this opportunity to serve with all of you. Thank you.

**BILL BASL:** Thank you.