

Continuity Planning

Webinar Session Highlights (March 29, 2018)



Recognizing the universality of transitions within organizations, AmeriCorps developed this session to help grantees prepare for staff changes and build their toolkits to ensure smooth transitions as they occur. The webinar introduced the concept of program continuity planning, provided an overview of 10 key elements of effective program continuity planning, highlighted three of the 10 elements in further detail, and shared tips to apply session learnings. The webinar also included a discussion, led by Marie Humenik of the New Jersey commission, that provided an overview of three their organization's approach to the continuity planning process.

Speakers:

Marie Humenik, Program Officer, New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service

Margaret Mattinson, Program Officer, AmeriCorps State and National

Barbara Reynolds, Senior Program and Project Specialist, AmeriCorps State and National

Brittany Tanning, Program Officer, AmeriCorps State and National

Continuity Planning Overview

Staffing changes happen at every level of organizations, regardless of type, size, and complexity. Continuity planning is the aspect of program management that focuses on preparing for such transitions to ensure that knowledge is documented and appropriately conveyed, and that the organization's activities, funding, relationships, and processes continue seamlessly during a shift from one staff member to the next.

Below are 10 management elements critical to continuity planning, paired with actionable steps associated with each:

1. **Timeline & Calendar:** Manage a timeline and calendar that incorporates CNCS organizational program and sub-grantee level timelines.
2. **Financial Resources & Funding:** Develop a record system for tracking funding types, amount, sources of program funding, spending status, and budget management processes at your organization.
3. **"Playbooks":** Maintain written policies and procedures on all program management aspects and ensure that AmeriCorps requirements are current and up-to-date.
4. **Staff Engagement:** Develop a plan for sharing operational knowledge by multiple staff at all levels.
5. **Technology:** Prepare information on what technology your organizations uses for program management.
6. **Record Keeping:** Maintain complete and compliant records. Ensure that new staff have adequate resources to learn and understand record keeping procedures and requirements.
7. **Performance Measurement & Reporting:** Prepare clear guidance on performance measurement and data collection processes and the instruments that you use.
8. **Member Management & Support:** Outline member management processes including recruitment enrollment and exit deadlines, member onboarding, timekeeping, and alumni engagement.
9. **Contacts & Relationships:** Develop a system to describe the contacts and functions of key stakeholders such as board members, funders, and media contacts.
10. **Resources:** Outline the external support available to your program during a transition.

While each of the 10 elements above are important to successful continuity planning, the AmeriCorps team emphasized three in terms of both context and best practices:

- **Timeline & Calendar:** Develop a detailed operational calendar for the entire year that lists key due dates as this will help new staff to gain an immediate understanding of what's on the horizon and enable them to determine required activities for the first week, month, three months, and beyond. The operational calendar and timeline should include any dates that are important to an organization's ability to operate including CNCS-related deadlines (e.g. grantee progress reports, federal financial reporting, grantee meetings) and non-CNCS related dates (e.g. program deadlines, fundraiser dates, volunteer start/end dates, staff and board meetings).

- **Funding:** Ensure that specific information and details related to funding are both documented and available to multiple key staff. For example, when keeping a record of number and types of grants received, include application IDs, funding levels, match requirements, budget period, and yearly check points. Additionally, note your organization's key financial processes and staff.
- **Playbooks:** Create easy-to-navigate playbooks that include guidance, policies, and procedures to facilitate AmeriCorps program management. Playbooks should include critical information for onboarding new staff such as a summary of current pending issues; a list of current and past audits; documentation of ideas, issues, and site visits; contact information for program stakeholders; links, instructions, and passwords to technology platforms; and FAQs (e.g. how to use e-grants, GPR procedures). Each member of an organization should be required to develop these kinds of documents for their own work portfolios and update them on a regular basis.

Case Study

Marie Humenik, a Program Officer with the New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service (NJ CNCS), presented three different approaches that NJ CNCS has taken in the context of continuity planning:

- 1) **Created a Mentor-Mentee Partnership:** To facilitate peer learning, foster team-building, and ensure compliance, each new program manager is paired with an experienced program manager who serves as a mentor. The formalized program begins with each mentor and mentee receiving guidance regarding engagement expectations (e.g. frequency and duration of interactions) and sample agendas and concludes with each mentor receiving a personalized framed certificate of appreciation signed by the executive director of the state commission.
- 2) **Developed an In-Person Orientation Plan:** To minimize the learning curve and ensure that all new program staff are familiar with AmeriCorps, NJ CNCS created an in-person orientation plan and a comprehensive program manager handbook. The orientation, which includes meeting with new program staff individually to review key aspects of AmeriCorps and provide an overview of data systems with which they will be working, is focused on helping all new staff to feel comfortable and confident. The handbook is disseminated and reviewed during orientation meetings and serves as a takeaway resource that includes information on AmeriCorps rules and regulations, terms and conditions, fiscal policies, and procedures. At the end of the orientation meeting, each new staff member must sign an acknowledgement that they have reviewed the information and agree to engage a point person and/or their mentor should further questions or concerns arise.
- 3) **Established a Collaborative Environment with Added Communication:** To foster a learning environment committed to growth, improvement, and excellence, NJ CNCS has instituted several means of capturing and sharing critical information. Each year, NJ CNCS solicits three to five best practices or lessons learned from the staff of each sub-grantee – information which is ultimately aggregated based on category and shared with the entire portfolio. On a monthly basis, NJ CNCS conducts one-on-one conference calls with each individual program to discuss challenges and successes, answer questions, and review key AmeriCorps updates. Every week, NJ CNCS emails sub-grantees with important reminders (e.g. progress report or application deadlines) and resources (e.g. links to useful resources). Finally, the commission created a recruitment and retention team which has developed a comprehensive recruitment tool that includes strategies, action items, and deadlines.

Continuity Planning in Action

In order to assess your organization to determine how ready you are for a significant organizational transition and implement next steps associated with continuity planning, below are several considerations:

- Review CNCS-developed documents to gauge your organization's readiness for possible staff transitions and begin the planning process including the self-assessment; continuity planning checklists, and transition summary outline (all available via the National Service Knowledge Network).
- Use the 10 elements highlighted herein to prioritize your development needs.
- Enact an action plan to gather resources and begin creating your organization's continuity plan.

For More Information

[CNCS Website](#)

[Grant Terms and Conditions](#)

[National Service Knowledge Network](#)