Case Study #1

THE SITUATION

Due to State elections in early February, a new Governor was elected. Shortly thereafter, she announced the appointment of a new Executive Director (ED) of the State Service Commission which took effect immediately. In addition to the ED, the office has three other staff – Program Officer, Senior Program Officer, and Training Specialist. The previous ED was in the position for ten years and had significant institutional knowledge and experience. The Senior Program Officer had been on the job for five years, but was not involved in any ED-level responsibilities or decisions and only focused on subgrantee management. The Program Officer and Training Specialist have both been on the job for less than six months. Incoming ED is being transferred from the State Office of Human Services and does not have any background in AmeriCorps. Due to the timing of the transition, there was no overlap between the new and outgoing Directors, and both the remaining staff and Commission Board are concerned about the impact of this unplanned transition on the continuity of operations.

What could the commission have done prior to this sudden transition to promote the sustainability of its funding, operations, and staffing? How could remaining staff and Commission Board contribute to ensuring continuity of operations?

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Case Study #2

THE SITUATION

In late June, a large hurricane is predicted to land along the Gulf Coast, where a national, multi-state AmeriCorps program is headquartered. The national program has affiliate offices and 500 AmeriCorps members in seven states. Two of the seven states where the AmeriCorps members serve are in the Gulf region, so both the Headquarters and members serving in the Gulf states will be impacted by the hurricane. Based on weather predictions, the national staff anticipate that their office will be off-line for at least one week. This is the final month of their AmeriCorps program year, and the national office is responsible for hosting the member graduation ceremony on July 1, exiting all of the members in the AmeriCorps Portal, and submitting all financial reports for the grant year.

What can the staff do in advance to help sustain the program operations and member support functions during this time?

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Case Study #3

THE SITUATION

A small organization runs a school-based, national AmeriCorps program with 20 members serving at ten schools in two neighboring states. The program has one staff member responsible for overall implementation, and one staff member who solely handles the fiscal side of the grant but is located in a different city. Although the AmeriCorps members are serving in the schools, the school staff aren't very engaged or involved with the program. The staff member who runs the program and has all the knowledge suddenly left her position. CNCS was never notified about the staff departure by the grantee organization, and for several months did not hear from the program which was mysteriously nonresponsive during this time. Finally, CNCS learned from a newly-hired program staffer that upon starting, she found no transition plan or information about how the program was being implemented, and was not able to immediately access the necessary files. It appeared that no one was running the program since the previous staff member's sudden departure. The organization's leadership had not been involved with the program and therefore did not have much information about its operation. During that interim period, both GPR and grant continuation deadlines were missed. As a result, the grant was on the verge of being terminated due to the organization being nonresponsive, missing several important deadlines, mishandling staff transition and concerns about its compliance. Most members only completed about half of their service requirement and may not be able to finish their service year.

What went wrong? What steps could the organization and staff have taken to prevent this?

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Case Study #4

THE SITUATION

An organization runs a national AmeriCorps program operating in multiple states with many members. A staff Program Assistant at the Headquarters Office was assigned to member oversight, member file management, and criminal history check compliance. This Program Assistant completed the necessary checks for members and staff for the current program year but then departed from her job. Within six months of her departure, CNCS was scheduled to conduct an onsite compliance visit with the organization. As part of the visit, the organization had to provide member and staff records to include criminal history check and member file documentation for review. While the remaining HQ staff understood that the previous Program Assistant took care of criminal history check and member file management and compliance, the actual documentation and proof for the files and checks could not be located. The HQ staff (other than the departed Program Assistant) were not well versed in the process and requirements for member file and criminal history check compliance. Thus, they could not produce or adequately explain what happened which resulted in site visit compliance findings and potential for significant disallowances and financial penalties for the organization.

What went wrong? What steps could the organization and staff have taken to prevent this?

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Case Study #5

THE SITUATION

An organization runs a national direct AmeriCorps program with 200 members serving in 10 states. It has three staff at the headquarters managing the grant, but most of the program implementation, including member recruitment, training, supervision, and management is delegated to 15 partner organizations. The program is approaching the end of its first year. The grantee set up appropriate systems and processes in place at the beginning of the grant to ensure that their partner organizations know how to implement the program and understand and follow the grant requirements. But, after that, they were mostly hands off in their oversight of those organizations. Nine months into the year, they began receiving complaints from members in one of the states about various issues. In addition, during a routine monitoring visit of organizations in that state, they learned that several months of member timesheets were missing, members had not received a living allowance for some time, and one member was asked by his host site's leadership to perform tasks for a staff person who was on maternity leave. After assessing the situation further, they realized that these organizations experienced turnover three months beforehand, and new staff were not aware of various things that needed to be done to implement the program and manage the members, allowing many tasks to fall through the cracks.

What went wrong? What steps could the grantee have taken to prevent this? What should the organization do now to mitigate this for the future?

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