

## Description of Audio for New AmeriCorps Start Up Institute July 23

### Slide 1:

This presentation was designed for staff of new AmeriCorps programs funded and launching in the 2015-2016 grant year. The PowerPoint and notes support the audio recording of the presentation found at <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/amicorps/new-amicorps-program-start-institute>.

### Slide 2:

*(These instructions do not apply for the audio replay of the presentation.)*

#### ON THE PHONE:

Please mute your line during the presentation by pressing \*6.

Unmute your line for the Q&A portions of the agenda; press \*6 to unmute the line.

#### ON SKYPE:

Use the dialogue box on the left side of your screen to provide input or ask a question at any time during the presentation.

There are two attachments to support this presentation: Resources for New Direct AmeriCorps Grantees and 2015 Checklist for New AmeriCorps Programs (posted on the National Service Knowledge Network: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/amicorps/new-amicorps-program-start-institute>)

### Slide 3:

The New AmeriCorps Program Start-up Institute is a series of workshops that are designed to help new CNCS grantees launch successful AmeriCorps programs. The 2015 series will include:

Session 1 – July 23, 2015

Orientation to CNCS and Basic Financial Management

Session 2 – August 20, 2015

AmeriCorps Member and Site Management; Financial Management Systems

Session 3 – September 16, 2015

Program Start-up Grantee Panel at 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Symposium

Session 4 – Fall, 2015

Grantee Reporting, Site Monitoring, Member Evaluation, Branding and AmeriCorps Identity

**Slide 4:**

Today's Agenda:

- CNCS Overview: Barbara Ellen Reynolds
- Financial Management Introduction: Bonnie Janicki
- National Service Criminal History Checks 101: Brian Cognato
- Closing Remarks

**Slide 5:**

Barbara is the first CNCS presenter on today's webinar. She is the Training Specialist for AmeriCorps State and National. She joined the CNCS team in September 2013. In her role, Barbara works closely with CNCS staff, AmeriCorps programs, and State Service Commissions to design and deliver training and technical assistance to strengthen AmeriCorps programs and service experiences.

Before joining CNCS, Barbara was the Executive Director of the Maryland Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism, the State's Service Commission, and the Director of Volunteer Maryland, a state-wide AmeriCorps program. She has a Master's in Public Administration from American University and is a proud graduate of Randolph-Macon College in Virginia.

**Slide 6:**

Welcome to the AmeriWorld. There are 16 new program grantees in 2015; you are joining a network of about 800 grantees across the country. Together, we will all recruit, train, deploy, celebrate, and graduate 70,000 AmeriCorps members over the next program year.

Here are the talking points for the orientation:

- How did we all get here today? How are AmeriCorps program grants made?
- CNCS overview
- Cycle of program development
- Next steps
- Resources to support grantees

**Slide 7:**

The AmeriCorps program grant-making process starts with the release by CNCS of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and the grant application instructions. This step typically occurs in the fall each year. For the 2015-2016 grant year competition, the deadline to apply was January 21, 2015.

**Slide 8:**

After applications are submitted in eGrants from applicants all over the country, CNCS embarks on a four-month long Grant Application Review Process (GARP). This process includes multiple levels of review – both internal and external – and negotiations with applicants before final funding decisions are made in late spring.

**Slide 9:**

Successful applicants receive a Notice of Grant Award – this is found in eGrants. The exact timing of issuing the notices varies in each grant year, and it tends to occur in June.

**Slide 10:**

Again, exact dates will vary, but once the grants are awarded, the real fun starts...it's time to find those awesome AmeriCorps members and launch the programs! Programs may launch as early as August or as late as October – depending on their program design. And there's even variability around those dates.

**Slide 11:**

It is important to keep in mind that AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency founded in 1993. In addition to AmeriCorps, CNCS oversees Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund. You can find a lot more information on those programs at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

**Slide 12:**

Types of AmeriCorps State and National Prime Grantees:

1. State Service Commissions
2. Direct Programs:
  - National or multi-state programs
  - Programs managed by Indian Tribes
  - Programs managed by US Territories
  - Programs funded in states without a commission

**Slide 13:**

1. Program Officer (PO): Your program officer is your primary point of contact with CNCS. He/she will support you in the implementation of your program and assist in resolving issues that arise concerning your grant. Program officers review progress reports and monitor programs for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. POs work closely with other units at CNCS to provide support to programs and will assist you in connecting to other personnel at the CNCS as necessary. All CNCS grantees should be in regular contact with their program officer, including, not limited to, monthly check-in calls.

2. Grants Officer (GO): Grants officers (also referred to as Grants Management Specialists or GOs) work in the Office of Grants Management (OGM) and are responsible for fiscal issues concerning your grant. GOs review your Federal Financial Reports (FFRs) and monitor financial management systems for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. Please copy your program officer on correspondence sent to grants officers so that they are aware of ongoing discussions.

3. Trust Officer: Trust officers work in the National Service Trust, which administers the Eli Segal Education Awards that AmeriCorps members receive. Trust officers are the primary contacts for issues related to the Education Award, such as forbearance, education award, interest payments, etc. Please copy your program officer on correspondence sent to trust officers so that they are aware of ongoing discussions.

**Slide 14:**

This is a basic organizational chart of the Corporation for National and Community Service. It indicates the agency's major programs and staffing units, and red arrows highlight the three key points of contact for AmeriCorps State and National prime grantees: the AmeriCorps State and National program officer, the Office of Grants Management grants officer, and the National Service Trust trust officer.

**Slide 15:**

AmeriCorps programs are organized around a set of structured activities, all of which are linked together in the Cycle of AmeriCorps Program Development. The Cycle is a general model of effective program development. Each AmeriCorps program has its own unique community, program design, and member population, and it will tailor its program development to best fit its needs.

The first phase of the cycle of program development is the Vision phase. Each AmeriCorps program addresses a specific community need with AmeriCorps resources. The program vision articulates the need and describes how AmeriCorps resources will be used in local communities.

The next phase of the cycle is Foundation-building. Each program also has the necessary infrastructure in place to guide its operations and member management. These include, but are not limited to, position descriptions, member and site policies and procedures, internal financial controls, and AmeriCorps member training tools.

The Implementation phase is where most of the visible AmeriCorps service occurs. In this phase, AmeriCorps members are deployed, supervised, and recognized by AmeriCorps program, site, or commission staff.

Finally, each program is expected to routinely evaluate its member service, operations, and impact and continuously improve its service delivery model.

**Slide 16:**

AmeriCorps is a human resource (AmeriCorps = people). This is important since many grants provide general operating or unrestricted funds; AmeriCorps funds people, and with that comes a great deal of opportunities and requirements. This is also the visual for you to keep in the front of your mind. All of your hard work (paper work!) is leading towards to deployment of a team of dedicated AmeriCorps members. They are the means by which we accomplish community service goals and they are also important beneficiaries of the AmeriCorps service.

**Slide 17:**

In just a few minutes, I will turn the presentation to my colleague, Bonnie Janicki, to start talking about AmeriCorps financial and grants management. Here's a quick review of what we have discussed so far:

- Welcome to the AmeriWorld!
- How AmeriCorps Program Grants Are Made
- CNCS Structure and Grantee Contacts
- AmeriCorps State and National Prime Grantees
- Cycle of AmeriCorps Program Development
- AmeriCorps = People

**Slide 18:**

AmeriLingo on this call:

AmeriCorps

member support

member experience

member training

member service

Prime Grantee

State Service Commission

National Direct Program

Multi-state Program

Tribal Program

US Territory

NOFO

GARP

CNCS

Corporation for National and Community Service

AmeriCorps State and National

Notice

PO

GO

Cycle

**Slide 19:**

I want to draw your attention to the trove of material that exists to govern your AmeriCorps grant and to support your implementation of your program. There are many resources and training support materials available on the National Service Knowledge Network: [www.nationalservice.gov/resources](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources)

Available materials include:

- ✓ Tutorials
- ✓ Sample Materials
- ✓ Recorded Webinars

**Slide 20:**

Bonnie Janicki is the Senior Grants Officer in the CNCS Office of Grants Management. Currently she manages a team of grants officers responsible for the day-to-day grants management of a diverse portfolio of programs that includes AmeriCorps State and National, Social Innovation Funds, Martin Luther King, and many others. Bonnie began her federal service with the Corporation in 1994 and continues to enjoy her work.

**Slide 21:**

These are the most critical items for new programs to learn and implement at the start of the grant year. The Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) includes period of performance, amount of award, any special conditions, names of program officer and grants officer, and a link to the grant Terms and Conditions (formerly called the Grant Provisions).

Be sure to share the NOGA and Terms and Conditions with both program and finance staff at your organization. These documents contain rules, laws, and references that apply to program management and financial management, and all staff are equally responsible for learning and implementing the grant requirements.

There are also trainings on these items on the National Service Knowledge Network.

**Slide 22:**

The Grant Terms and Conditions are issued at the same time as your Notice of Grant Awards (both in eGrants). The Terms and Conditions are the guiding principles for your grant, and they contain key program and financial management rules. It is also important to know that these Terms and Conditions are binding for the CNCS prime grantees (i.e., state commissions and programs funded directly by CNCS) and subgrantees (i.e., programs funded by state commissions).

**Slide 23:**

Efficient Accounting System

Distinguish between:

- grant vs. non-grant related expenditures
- CNCS vs. grantee share
- direct and indirect costs
- program years
- budget categories

All costs charged to the grant must be supported by clear documentation.

**Slide 24:**

Resources are available to support AmeriCorps program financial management on the CNCS website and Knowledge Network. Specifically, you can find:

- Grant Terms and Conditions
- AmeriCorps Regulations

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/managing-ameriCorps-grants>

--Trainings

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/financial-management>

### **Slide 25:**

Brian is one of CNCS' two subject matter experts on Criminal History Checks. He's relatively new to the Corporation, having joined roughly six months ago, and is enjoying learning from his colleagues. Today he'll be talking about one very important element of the "Terms and Conditions" that Bonnie discussed earlier, Criminal History Checks.

### **Slide 26:**

The Criminal History Check (CHC) process is a series of requirements based in law to protect vulnerable populations. You can see the core of this law on this slide. Four categories of individuals are prohibited from working or serving in CNCS-funded programs:

- Anyone who refuses to undergo a criminal history check;
- Anyone who makes a false statement in connection with a check;
- Anyone listed, or required to be listed on a sex offender registry; and
- Anyone convicted of murder.

The regulation goes on to list other requirements, including how to make sure these categories of individuals don't work or serve and when those processes need to be initiated or completed. We'll be reviewing all of those requirements today.

### **Slide 27:**

As you all know, CNCS takes the CHC requirements **very** seriously. We have made our standards for the CHC process clear from the very highest level: "on-time, every time." CNCS expects its grantees and subgrantees to conduct criminal history checks compliantly on-time, every time, without exceptions. This is because these requirements are, at their heart, a public safety issue. While we are very proud of the work that our AmeriCorps grantees do, that work comes with a responsibility to "do no harm," that is, to make sure that our programs do not have any unintended negative consequences. This is the primary motivation of the CHCs, to protect vulnerable populations that we serve.

Of course, there are other reasons why the CHC requirements are important:

- CNCS is a steward of taxpayer dollars, and needs to ensure those dollars are spent wisely. We know our grantees take that responsibility seriously as well;

- The requirements themselves are based in law. They were enacted by the U.S. Congress in the Serve America Act and the National and Community Service Act before that. Consequently, we are bound by law to execute and enforce them, and our grantees are bound by law to comply.
- They are time-sensitive. Certain parts of the process need to be completed prior to any individual working or serving. This is why they are so important for new grantees and why we take the time to introduce them to you at the very beginning of the process.

For all these reasons, noncompliance can have serious consequences. Cost disallowance is the standard penalty for noncompliance, and grantees that do not meet the standard of on-time, every time, should expect to lose out on grant funds.

### **Slide 28:**

While the standard is clear, we are confident that our grantees can meet that standard and we are here to help you do that. We believe the keys to success in this process are the “Three D’s of CHCs:”

- Do the right checks
- Do them by the right date
- Document your actions

In this presentation and throughout your time with CNCS, you will receive lots of information about the CHC process and it can be complicated at times. However, if you stay focused on the “Three D’s of CHCs,” you can be on-time, every time. We’ll tell you more about how to do that today, and we’ll repeat this framework throughout to point out key steps in the CHC process.

### **Slide 29:**

These three checks are the primary tools in your CHC toolkit, and we’ll spend some time talking about each of them:

- A search of the National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW);
- State and Territory Checks; and
- FBI Checks

### **National Sex Offender Public Website**

The NSOPW is a free, online, instant search of sex offender registries all across the country, located at [NSOPW.gov](http://NSOPW.gov). Every state and territory and many Indian tribes maintain their own registries, aggregated through the NSOPW. Those of you who are participating online can go to [NSOPW.gov](http://NSOPW.gov), enter any name in the box you will see on the right side of the screen, and search all of those registries. This check is required for every individual who receives a salary, stipend, living allowance or education award from CNCS. There are a few potential complications to note:

- **Clear all “hits”:** When you search the NSOPW, particularly if you use a common name, you may well receive results. It is your responsibility to verify that these results are not your applicant. You can do this by clicking on the link provided, which will give you more information (for example, their age or a picture). There are several ways to document this. We recommend printing out the results and checking names off on the printout as you go.
- **Fill gaps from missing registries:** Because the NSOPW draws its information from other registries, one or more of those registries may not be reporting at any time due to technical issues. When that happens, you will see a note indicating that at the top of the results. You must find a way to fill that gap. You can do this either by going directly to the website of that directory or by searching the NSOPW again at a later date.

These are the basic actions that you must **DO** for a compliant NSOPW. The **DATE** you complete an NSOPW is crucial. **You must complete a search of the NSOPW for every individual in a covered position prior to the start of his or her work or service.** This includes both staff and volunteers. We cannot stress this enough. **You cannot charge any hours of staff or volunteer time to your grant until you complete a search of the NSOPW.** We are very firm on that point.

The **DOCUMENTATION** requirements for the NSOPW include the results and, as we just discussed, evidence that you have reviewed all records returned.

### **State and Territory Checks**

Referred to as “state checks” for short, these checks are searches of state and territories’ official criminal history repositories. Every state has one official body, which is listed in a document on CNCS’ website, which we will provide a link for later. When conducting a state check, you need to be sure to:

- **Conduct both a state of service and state of residence check:** The “state of service” is just what it sounds like, the state where an individual conducts their work or service. The “state of residence” is the state where an individual physically resides at the time of their application. We often receive questions on this point. As the state of residence is where someone physically resides, it may be different than their permanent residence. In the form we most often see the question, a college student resides in a dormitory in one state, but considers another state their permanent home. In this scenario, the state where the student lives (the one containing the dormitory) would be the state of residence. Even a single day as a resident would meet the test for where an individual has made a home. This also means that you need to have a process in place to determine where an individual lives at the time of application. Asking for their permanent residence may not be enough.
- **Use the designated repository:** Only those repositories listed in the document on CNCS’ website are compliant. Do not use any other repositories unless we have approved them first. We will talk about how you can submit a request for approval of an alternative shortly.

The relevant **DATE** for state checks is based on the date they are **initiated**. This is different from the NSOPW, which must be **complete** by the start of work or service. CNCS defines “initiation” as one verifiable step after consent. That broad definition means that you and your subgrantees must choose their own initiation processes and document them in your procedures manuals. Common examples of initiation are sending information to a state repository or scheduling a fingerprinting appointment. Either of these, and many others, would be compliant, provided that you document them and document that they occur no later than the first day of work or service in all cases.

The **DOCUMENTATION** requirements for state checks include documenting the repository used, the results, the date initiated and the dates cleared. You must also document that you have considered the results. This may sound obvious, but we do see it missed sometimes. Again, there are many ways to do this. Some organizations annotate the results directly; others use a checklist for the entire process, with a decision documented at the bottom. These and other methods would be compliant, provided you document your process and follow it consistently.

### **FBI Checks**

FBI Checks are the final tool in our CHC toolkit. The FBI offers a fingerprint-based, nationwide search that offers the broadest coverage of any of the available checks. In most cases, you receive an FBI check from your state repository, the same organization you would go to for a state check, available on our website. In some circumstances, these groups won't be able to provide you with a search for various reasons. When that's the case, you can either request an exemption or request the check directly from the FBI. We will talk about those alternatives in more depth later in the presentation. The key information for you to know now is that you **DO** need to first determine if you can receive an FBI check through a state repository and, if that is not available, **DO** consult your program officer at CNCS to learn more about your other options.

The **DATE** for an FBI check is the same as it is for a state check. Specifically, an FBI check must be **initiated** no later than an individual's first day of work or service. “Initiation” here has the same meaning as it does for state checks – one step after consent. You must document your own process in your procedures manual, follow it consistently and ensure that you capture the date of initiation consistently.

The **DOCUMENTATION** requirements for an FBI check again echo those of a state check. Document the date it is initiated, the date it is cleared, the results, the source, and that the results of the check were considered.

### **Slide 30:**

If both your state and FBI checks only need to be **initiated** prior to an individual's start of work or service, that means that an individual may be working or serving before you have definitively established if they have been convicted of murder or a sex offense. When that's the case, we use a system called “accompaniment” to mitigate risk to vulnerable populations. Accompaniment is when an individual who has their checks pending is physically accompanied by someone who has been cleared to access vulnerable populations. Let's unpack this to determine what we actually need to **DO**:

- First, the individual who does the accompaniment **does not** need to have gone through CNCS' criminal history check requirements to accompany. Instead, they can go through any clearance process to give them access to vulnerable populations by virtue of their employment. This includes groups like teachers, social workers, or any other individuals who must go through some form of clearance process to work with vulnerable populations.
- Second, individuals only need to be accompanied when they are in the presence of vulnerable populations. If you have an Executive Director on your grant who spends his or her time managing the project from within an office, and he or she doesn't interact with vulnerable populations, they do not need to be accompanied while completing reports, developing project plans, or similar activities.
- Finally, accompaniment can cease when either state checks OR an FBI check clears. Remember that some individuals will need two state checks, a state of service check and a state of residence check. As soon as BOTH of these state checks OR the FBI check clears, you can cease accompaniment.

The relevant **DATES** for accompaniment are whenever an individual has access to vulnerable populations. This means that spot-checks are not enough: accompaniment should be conducted 100% of the times when an individual without either cleared state checks or an FBI check is in the presence of vulnerable populations.

For accompaniment, you need to **DOCUMENT** the date, the time, and the person who was doing the accompaniment. There are many ways to do this. The most common that we see is using timesheets. Other organizations will hand their volunteers a paper log to take with them as they serve, having individuals doing accompaniment sign off along the way. You must also document how you know the individuals doing the accompaniment are cleared. You don't need documentation for each accompanier. Something like a school's procedures manual that lists the clearance requirements for teachers would suffice.

### **Slide 31:**

Unfortunately, we cannot address every individual situation you will encounter in doing CHCs in this webinar. You will come up with challenges and unusual circumstances. When that is the case, you can request that we approve alternatives to our official requirements. We generally approve these when they are either "substantially equivalent" to our requirements or when you are prohibited by state law from fulfilling one of our requirements. You can go to our website and find directions on how to submit one of these "Alternative Search Procedures" (ASPs). In addition, we have seen some of these ASPs so many times that we have gone ahead and approved them for everyone, in what we call "Blanket ASPs." We have outlined our current Blanket ASPs on this slide, but it's very important that you review them in more detail before using them, because there are more elements, including documentation requirements, for each. You can find them in our FAQ document, listed under FAQ 16.

Although CNCS approval is not strictly required for you to use one of these ASPs, we strongly recommend touching base with your Program Officer (PO) before doing so, as you don't want any misunderstandings. Similarly, you should talk to your PO before submitting an ASP to us. They may have additional recommendations that will be quicker and easier than the formal ASP process.

### **Slide 32:**

One resource that is available is the industry of for-profit criminal history check vendors. There are many companies that would be very happy to help you with the CHC requirements for a fee. Our advice to you when working with vendors is "**buyer beware.**" You must exercise extreme due diligence when contracting with a vendor, because if they do not provide a check that is compliant, your organization is responsible, not the vendor. The majority of noncompliance cases that we see involve a noncompliant vendor check. We are not aware of any vendors that can provide compliant criminal history checks in 100% of cases. That does not mean you cannot use them. They may be able to provide compliant checks in some cases, or they may be able to assist you with parts of the process. However, it does mean that you need to work with them to document exactly what they are providing and compare it to our requirements to ensure compliance.

Similar principles apply to working with Human Resources (HR) departments. They may assume their checks comply with our requirements, but if they have not worked with CNCS' CHC process before, that is unlikely. Our requirements are very different from most standard checks. We have a resource on our webpage, which we'll share in just a minute, that has all the questions you should ask any organization that is conducting criminal history checks for you.

### **Slide 33:**

On this slide, you can see a link to the page where we have all of our resources. This is the Criminal History Check home on the Knowledge Network. We're going to spotlight some particular resources for you, as we talk about the next steps you should take.

### **Slide 34:**

So where do you begin? Here's how you can get started with a new grant to get up to speed quickly and meet our on-time, every time standard.

- First, go to the Knowledge Network and review the documentation there in more detail. Due to time restrictions, we can't cover everything in this session. Instead, we've just aimed to give you an overview of the most important parts of the process. We've got lots more information on each of the checks we discussed under the "Components" heading on this page. Begin by reviewing those carefully.
- Next identify your "covered positions." An individual is in a covered position if he or she receives a salary, stipend, living allowance, or education award from CNCS. These individuals are subject to the CHC requirements. Note that this can include both staff and volunteers and even includes

individuals without access to vulnerable populations. Individuals' access to vulnerable populations only affects the **kinds** of checks they get. Everyone in a covered position needs an NSOPW check. In addition, those in a covered position without recurring access to vulnerable populations only require a state OR FBI check, and those in covered positions with recurring access require all three. We didn't spend a lot of time discussing this during this training because the standard for "recurring access" to vulnerable populations is relatively low, and most individuals will likely need all three checks. If you want to learn more about this, contact your Program Officer.

Your primary tool for identifying who is in a covered position isn't one developed by CNCS, but rather, it is your budget. In most cases, if a position appears on your budget, whether it is on the federal side or match side, that's a covered position, and thus, subject to these requirements. Remember, these checks are required for all individuals who receive a salary, stipend, living allowance or education award from CNCS funds, including subgrantees. So go back to your budget and identify who is covered, including staff and future volunteers.

- Once you have done that, review your policies and procedures. We have a tool to help you do that on our website as well, called "Procedures Review." You can take that checklist, compare it to your own procedures manual, and make sure that you have the right systems in place.
- Finally, start conducting the checks. We have two tools that can help you with that, the "Steps Checklist," which maps out the full process for a given covered position, and the "Documentation Checklist," which allows you to track documentation requirements as an individual goes through the process. You can get started by working your staff through the process, and, if you use these tools, you can ensure your checks are on-time, every time going forward.

We also have an eCourse on our resources page that provides much more information than we've been able to discuss today. We highly recommend it, particularly if you will be working with others in your organization to complete the checks.

### **Slide 35:**

What questions do you have?

### **Slide 36:**

Wrap Up for Today:

Resources at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)

- Grant Terms and Conditions
- AmeriCorps Page on the Knowledge Network

- Branding and AmeriCorps Identity Resources

Next New Program Start-up Institute Session

- August 20, 3:00 – 4:30 pm Eastern

**Slide 37:**

Thank you for participating in today's webinar. Have a good afternoon.