

AmeriCorps Staff Development Series

Financial Grants Management



Text Transcript

Barbara Reynolds: Hi! Good afternoon. This is Barbara Reynolds at CNCS. I am very pleased to welcome you to today's presentation on financial grants management.

If you are hearing my voice right now and you have not yet put yourself on the map on the screen in front of you or completed one of the polls, please take just a couple of seconds to do that. We're going to end the polls and switch the screen in just a second. We want to get a sense, if you could, for folks on the phone, if you are an AmeriCorps alum, we'd love to see that on the poll. Also love to get a sense of the number of years that you've worked with grants management, and also the positions that you represent, so just a couple more seconds on these polls, if you don't mind going ahead and giving us this information.

Alright! We are going to jump into today's presentation. As I said, we're going to be looking at financial and grants management today. Let me get back to our beginning. Sorry about that. We were doing a little rehearsal before we started. Oh no, I'm going to give you guys a headache, clicking around.

We are looking at a couple different topics today. Before we jump into the content, I want to do a quick technology check with you, just to make sure that folks on the phone, folks online, that you're seeing and hearing everything for today's presentation.

First of all, on the screen in front of you, hopefully, you can see a little web links pod for Adobe Connect. In that field, you're going to see links to a number of different resources that we will reference today. You'll see a link to the Knowledge Network, where all of the PowerPoint slides that you're going to see today are going to live. You'll also see a link to the training evaluation, and we'll follow up with you at the end of today's presentation to get some feedback. Those are two specific things that you see in the web links, along with, again, other resources that we'll talk about today.

I do want to let you know that we are recording today's presentation, as you can see on your screen. If you don't want to be recorded or don't want to have your name on there, please disconnect. We are going to post this presentation on the Knowledge Network in early August, so please make a point to come back and take a look at that material, if you want, next month.

And we will definitely use the chat box throughout today's presentation, so if you could, do me a favor right now and let's test the chat box feature. I just want to make sure that you're hearing my voice clearly, and that you see the chat box and are able to use it. If you could, just take a second and type a howdy, how you doing, what's going on, greetings from Alaska, anything like that in the chat box. Thank you. I see a lot of people typing in there. Thank you for that. Yep. Hello. Great to see you guys. Thanks. Keep it coming. This is the webinar version of going around in a circle and introducing ourselves, so you can see who all's on the webinar with us today.

We just have a couple of framing comments to place today's presentation within our annual staff development series for our AmeriCorps program partners and our commission partners. In general, the webinars that we provide are meant to provide some skill building, or some knowledge building, around core programmatic and grant management topics, things that are really, really critical and urgent to the work that we do together. We hope that those of you who are on today and shared your greetings in the chat box, that you're able to unplug. I really recommend you close down your email, you turn your phone over while we're on this webinar, just to give yourself a chance to disconnect and really focus on today's topic.

This year, we have a number of different webinars that we're providing in the 2018 series. You can see on the slide in front of you, we're just about halfway through, having covered the topics at the top of your screen over the first months of this year. Coming up in August, you'll see we're also going to be looking at AmeriCorps member orientation and training, member and site monitoring and reporting, and then, in the fall, we'll be looking at some of the reporting and data quality monitoring aspects of our work together. That is what the series looks like for this year.

Today's target audience, I would say, is similar to other webinars that we've presented this year. We assumed, I should say, and we know now because we see your introductions in the chat box, that we are joined today by a combination of state commission staff, national program staff, potentially some tribal program staff for sub-grantees. We

assume, when we're doing these webinars, that you are relatively new or very new to your position in this topic, or you're on this webinar because your job, or the folks that you work with closely, are directly involved with this work. For today, obviously, we're all about the money, all about the grants management, and so we assume that you guys who are participating have a heavy role in that, as well.

Our agenda today includes three broad categories. We have two CNCS staff members who'll be leading your conversation. They're going to look at some of the how to build frameworks for support for your grants, particularly your financial management systems. They'll look at some of the systems in how to preserve the foundation, once you've built that framework, and then they'll talk about some of the challenges and pitfalls to avoid, so in really broad strokes, that's the content of the conversation for today.

Barbara Reynold: We will have time at the end for Q&A, and at the end we'll note some resources and wrap up for today's session. As I said, as we are going through this content, though, please feel free to use the chat box to ask a question, make a comment, and our presenters today will be asking you questions and asking for you to answer in the chat box.

Great. Thank you. Saw a lot of hellos in the chat box. Thank you guys.

It's my pleasure, now, to introduce our CNCS speakers for today. First up, we have Thea Becton, who is on the screen in front of you. You can see that Thea has been a grants officer since 2015. Prior to that, she worked with the great program NCCC as an assistant program director, and has been involved with service and a lifelong volunteer. Thea and I live in the great city of Baltimore, and we also share a love of puppies, which you can see on the slide in front of you, as well.

Next up and joining Thea today is Tracey Seabolt. Tracey's been a grants officer since 2012. She has a long history with AmeriCorps and with CNCS, working extensively in the great state of Maryland, as well. You've got a big Maryland crew on the phone with you today. Tracey, as well, has been extensively involved in non-profit management and volunteer service, and is a lover of the puppies as well as kittens. I think it's kind to give a fair love.

Without further ado, it's my pleasure to turn it over, today, to Tracey first.

Tracey Seabolt: Great. Thank you, Barbara, and thank all of you for joining us. Thrilled to be speaking with you all today, and delighted to see so many people on this call, and such a diverse audience. I appreciate you all answering our polls earlier so that we could get an idea of who was joining us today, the role you're in, your level of experience working in AmeriCorps grants management.

I do want to tag on to what Barbara was saying earlier about being new to this role, or having a brand new program, or just knowing that this is your responsibility. And with that, I just need to emphasize that, regardless of what your role is, one of the messages that you will consistently hear from any of us in the grants management office is that this is everyone's responsibility. Whether you are in the program office, in the fiscal office, the executive director, a commissioner, or a board member, really, the financial grants management is everyone's responsibility, and we want to make sure everyone has a really clear understanding and knows how to build and sustain that foundation for your programs.

If you are the sole representative of your organization on this call, certainly please feel free to forward the recording to others in your organization, and your friends and colleagues across the country, because really, we want to make sure that everyone has those supports, knows how to develop those supports, and to keep them strong, and to avoid any of those situations that may cause that foundation to crumble a little bit, so please feel free to share.

Before we get started, we do want to ask the question from all of you, and if you would use the chat function to tell us: What is the single idea, related to establishing your financial grants management foundation that terrifies you the most? And hopefully we will, in some way, be able to address that, but we really want to know what made you jump on this call? What are you hoping to address? What single grants management idea really is the one that's at the top of your list?

Compliance. Barbara doesn't want to go to jail. Well, none of us wants to go to jail or wants you to go to jail. Regulations. We're going to talk about those regulations, and helping you stay in compliance. And we are definitely talking about documentation, Lisa. Monitoring the budgets, good. Allowable costs. Reporting! Absolutely. Nice.

Robyn, I appreciate the fact that you want to know more about the fiscal side of things, and again, that speaks to the fact that this is everyone's responsibility, regardless of which hat you're wearing. We're all in this together. We all have those responsibilities that fall under our position description, but we also need to be aware that we need to support one another, and all be aware of the compliance.

Disallowed costs, yeah. Whatever it is that I don't know. Okay, well yeah, we're going to talk about that, too. And

we're going to get started by talking about the fundamentals. Coach Holtz said, "Build your empire on the firm foundation of the fundamentals."

We want to make sure that you know those fundamentals, that you ... And if you are an experienced person, that you're not necessarily building on those fundamentals, but maybe you're dusting off those fundamentals, making sure that they're up to snuff at the level that they could and should be. Again, we want to make sure that we've got that strong foundation, to avoid waste, fraud, abuse, unallowable cost, Barbara going to jail, whatever it happens to be.

Coach Holtz also said, "In the successful organization, no detail is too small to escape close attention", so, "In the successful organization, no detail is too small to escape close attention", and that's not just true on the football field. That's true in financial grants management. Details matter. I'm sure some of you probably went through some budget resolution issues, and you know that whether it's budgets, or whether it's miscalculating some expenditures in your line items, or entering expenditures incorrectly in your general ledger, those details matter.

And so you have to not only have that foundation, but also make sure that whatever those policies, the procedures, the financial systems, your training staff, all of that is consistently used to support your programs, and that's what we're going to focus on today.

I think that we pretty much hit, or will hit, on the concerns that you all have. Hopefully we'll get through all of your concerns, and certainly if you have questions, feel free to put them in that chat box. If we can't get to them during today's call, when we finish, we are going to have a little bit of time, probably, for some one-on-one. If you've got one of those odd questions, you can certainly ask it then. We can get back to you, or definitely, as we always tell you, check in with your grants officer and you can get some help there, too. That is your go-to.

Let's start talking about those frameworks for support, and we really, like I said, want to make sure you understand how to build that framework to support strong systems. We want you to be able to lay that foundation so that you can build your house, and in this case, your AmeriCorps program.

How do you know where to start? What are those fundamentals that Coach Holtz talked about? What are those building blocks? In the chat, you all talked about compliance and knowing the regulations, and certainly the regulations are going to come into play with this piece of it, but how do you know where to find those regulations?

The starting point for that is your Notice of Grant Award. The notice, the terms and conditions within it, they all provide that guidance for building your framework, whether it's explicitly or by reference, and those are the most critical items that we want our new programs to understand and get you off to a strong and a compliant start. Within the Notice of Grant Award and the terms and conditions, you'll find direction for setting up or reviewing your organization's accounting systems, knowing how to conduct compliant criminal history checks, and other fundamentals that will get you off to a good start.

Let's take a look at your Notice of Grant Award, and with three questions that we want to ask related to the Notice of Grant Award. First of all, we'd like you all to answer in here: Have you seen your Notice of Grant Award? I like that. Did you, personally, thoroughly review your Notice of Grant Award? And did you review your Notice of Grant Award with your team?

It looks like we've got a majority of folks, upward of 75%, that have seen it. That's great, and have thoroughly reviewed it, and it looks like we're about half-and-half of reviewing it with your team. And again, going back to what I was saying earlier about this is everyone's responsibility, I definitely encourage you to ... As soon as you get that Notice of Grant Award, schedule a staff meeting. Bring the whole team together, and sit down, and look at that Notice of Grant Award as a team, and that way everyone is starting out on the same page, has a clear understanding of what's in it, and there's no confusion of, "Oh wait, we have this, we have that." Everybody knows up-front.

Let's take a look at what's in the Notice of Grant Award. If you're one of the 25% that has not seen it, this is what it looks like when you print it out. And the details within, you will see you have your approved project and budget periods, to make sure that you are conducting activities and allowing costs during the allowable time period. If you start running your programs, if you start incurring expenses, before that start date, you could find yourself in a little bit of hot water.

Also within, you will see the amount of your award and the details related to the MSYs and the slots awarded. You'll find your match requirements, and then I definitely encourage you to pay special attention to this area, the special conditions. Not everybody has a special condition on your award, but you want to look to make sure there are none, and if there are, that you are adhering to those and following whatever guidance is in there.

Also on your Notice of Grant Award, and not shown in these screenshots, is the name of your grants officer and your program officer, and their contact information, and that's something you definitely want to see. Take a look at that

piece of it and know where to contact the folks that can help you.

And then, also, there is a link to the grant terms and conditions, so that's that by reference part that I mentioned. They have both the general and the program's specific terms and conditions, and then also the certifications and assurances. And beyond the Notice of Grant Award, I also recommend that you look at those terms and conditions, and the certifications and assurances, as a team, again, so that everyone knows exactly what's included and what their responsibility is, and regardless of your role, you know what everybody else has to do. You can be checks for each other.

And if you are the authorized representative on this award, I definitely encourage you to scan this a little bit stronger than maybe other folks in your organization would, because ultimately, at the end of the day, we're going to come back to you and say, "This is your responsibility. It doesn't matter what your role is within the organization", so you definitely want to know everything that is in here.

Alright? Any questions about that? Alright, seeing none, then we'll move on to look a little bit at the terms and conditions. In the back of this slide, you'll see the front page of the terms and conditions. Hopefully that looks familiar to all of you, and not a completely new idea.

But CNCS issues these grant award terms and conditions at the same time that we issue the Notice of Grant Award. There are those links that I showed you within the Notice of Grant Award, and they are the guiding principles for your grant. They contain the key program and financial management roles. They are binding, not only for the CNCS prime grantee, the state commissions, the national direct, the tribes that we fund, but also for the sub-grantees.

If you're a commission and you're funding sub-grants, these terms and conditions are as binding on them as they are you. You want to make sure that your agreements reference these, or I've seen some people with, "Oh, let's just attach them directly", too, but you can certainly reference. They're posted on CNCS's website, and we have a link for those in the resources, that that's available to you.

The general terms and conditions outline the rules and govern your awards, and it also gives their order of precedence. They also provide guidance on your financial management standards, the criminal history check requirements, CNCS monitoring responsibilities, so a lot of those things that you all were reporting in the chat, you will find that in the terms and conditions.

And then the program-specific terms and conditions, they will give you the guidance related to member management, and they'll talk about prohibited activities, and timekeeping processes, the member living allowances, and other support costs, so you want to definitely look through both sets of those so that you have a very clear understanding of all of the requirements and the regulations.

And again, both of these, there's links for those in the Notice of Grant Award. Somebody mentioned about the regulations. This includes references to those regulations, so definitely you'll want to go back, look at those, look at the various ranks, and we're going to talk about those in just one second and work through those with your team.

Let's talk about those regulations, because that's certainly another place where you have your foundation fundamentals. Hopefully this 2 CFR either looks or sounds familiar to you. It is the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 2, also known as the Uniform Guidance, or the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, And Audit Requirements For Federal Awards, which is just way too much of a mouthful.

But that is one our one-stop guide for federal grants management. That's the guide that will provide consistency and uniformity among federal agencies. The cost principles will help direct, as far as what's allowable, what's allocable, reasonable, necessary ...

as far as what's allowable, what's allocable, reasonable, necessary, and then the audit requirements. We'll talk about that single audit you need annually, perhaps, and the administrative requirements. And the administrative requirements is a lot of what we're going to focus on here today. That's really where your foundation will be built.

In addition, there's the 45 CFR, Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations that includes the agency-specific guidance that has precedence over your AmeriCorps award.

Alright. As we talked about those administrative requirements, one of the things that is included in there is your accounting system review. Now, I know from that first poll that many of you are program staff. That doesn't mean you get to walk away at this point. This isn't the time to go check email. This is where the program staff that want to learn more about the fiscal side of the house, this is your chance to do just that. Even if you're not an accountant, part of the finance office, it doesn't make this any less of your responsibility. It actually makes it more so. You can go back to the finance team and say, "Hey, look what I learned. We need to make sure that we're doing this."

The administrative requirements that we just talked about, they require that your organizational financial management systems are able to distinguish grants versus non-grant related expenses. That is, you need to be able to

segregate your funds and account for each award separately, your CNCS and your grantee share. Make sure that you're able to distinguish those.

You need to be able to identify your cost by program year and by budget category, and that includes your direct and your indirect costs. Excuse me.

And one thing I think that's important to remember, and folks often get confused about this, is it doesn't mean you have to have a separate bank account for, "This is my formula AmeriCorps award CNCS share, so it has to go to bank A, and this is my competitive AmeriCorps award grantee match and it has to go in bank B", and then there's 17 other banks along the way. It just means you need to be able to identify these costs individually, be able to track them separately, so that when you're, then, reporting and you're looking at your federal financial report, you know where your CNCS share of your expenses for this award versus that award. Where is the grantee share for each of these? And we want to make sure that you're not co-mingling those funds, and that you're taking precautions to prevent that from occurring. You just need the proper accounting systems to show what's charged to each of the funds.

And then the other piece of this is that you need to make sure that all of your grant-related costs are supported by clear documentation, and you see a number of different types of documentation coming up there, whether it's a time sheet or a payroll voucher an invoice, whatever it happens to be, but you need to make sure that you've got all of the documentation, so that that will support, when you're doing not only the reporting that I mentioned, but also when you're doing your budget, to actual comparisons. We're going to talk a little bit about that in just a few minutes. And so definitely want to have that clear documentation trail.

And I am going to pause there, see if we have any questions related to any of this. What is acceptable documentation, Kimberly? We are going to talk about that shortly, in some form, so if you can just bear with us for just a few moments. And we'll go back to the next piece.

I'm actually going to pass this over to Thea.

Thea Becton: Alright. Thank you, Tracey.

And so, at this time, we're going to invite you to use the chat feature and to suggest the fundamentals that result in effective financial management. If you could please join us in the chat to tell us, what are some of the things that you use at your organization that could lead to helping you to manage your financial resources effectively?

Tracey Seabolt: Chart of accounts, easily searchable electronic records, general ledger, effective team communication. Rachel, thank you. General ledgers, internal controls.

Thea Becton: Yay, Lisa! Written policies and procedures.

Where is the check? A good relationship with the accounting team. That certainly helps. That's great. Fantastic!

Written policies and procedures, as indicated in the chats, are a great part of helping us to better manage, and to effectively manage, federal resources. In addition to policies and procedures, having a qualified and trained financial staff on your federal grant, helping to prepare and to ensure that you have clear separation of duties, is also important.

Effective communication, as you've shared. Self-assessment and continuous improvement. There's a way that you can use your CNCS and your own monitoring tools to identify weaknesses and opportunities for growth. Active, knowledgeable, and informed board and finance committees help to raise the match with your capacity building, and also recruitment and oversight. Many times, our board members can be overlooked resources, so you want to remember that your board members do have fiduciary responsibility.

As Jacqueline noted, having internal controls, so having sufficient internal controls is really important for your organization's checks and balances.

And so many of the things that we are going to cover in this part of the presentation have been brought forward in the chat, and so we thank you for that, and now we're going to look more closely at some of these that we have discussed.

As you can see on your screen at this time, we're looking at policies and procedures, and so our policies and procedures, together with our rules and regulations identified in the terms and conditions, make up what we refer to as our internal controls. Your policies and procedures are there to help you, so that you know how to respond to situations when they come up.

For example, how do you manage debt collection? If you don't know, you should have a policy and procedure available to guide you. As you discuss your policies and procedures, you want to remember that your policies explain what to do, and your procedures are the how, which are necessary to fulfill that policy. All staff must be familiar with these documents, know how to follow them, and abide with them. With that in mind, it's essential to provide training to ensure staff have a full understanding.

As you look at your policies and procedures, you want to make sure that they're implemented, that they're documented, that they're current, they're comprehensive, and inclusive. Being able to check the policies and procedures box and go beyond just saying yes when asked, "Do you have them", it's really important that you also use them. And while accountability starts with executive leadership, it's everyone's responsibility. Policies and procedures help to ensure that accountability, providing the information is documented and up to date.

Many times during monitoring visits, we're really looking to test your policies and procedures, because we want to ask the questions and answer, "how do you manage your award, what do your policies and procedures say, and do your records support that claim?"

And now we're going to look at our budget versus actuals. During our discussion of the accounting system, we noted that organizational financial management systems must be able to compare actual expenses with budgeted amounts. These budget to actual reviews are just one tool for monitoring your organization's finances and, if applicable, providing financial oversight of your program. The process and tools used during the review could take various forms, and yours will be determined by your organization's policies and procedures.

This chart before you is just one example of a tool that might be used during a budget to actual review, in which the program and official teams should collaboratively compare the budget to the amounts of both the CNCS and the grantee share with the actual expenses. As you build your tool, it may show the available balances for each line item, and for the total grant. It may also show the percentage of change, so you know when a budget modification is required, when the cumulative change in the budget section exceeds 10% of the total grant.

When you're looking at your budget to actuals, be sure to monitor your appropriate match. Avoid reductions of the CNCS share at closeout. You also want to avoid large amounts of un-expensed funds at closeout, and also avoid over-spending early in your award period, and not having funds to complete all your grant activities. These are times when it's really important that your financial staff and your program staff are in regular communication about what activities occur early in your program, and which activities occur later on.

Segregation of duty. As you develop your policies and procedures, understand that they also help to reduce the risk of unlawful activity. Your organization has to ensure, through your policies and procedures, that you also have adequate separation of duties. This helps to ensure that one person having responsibility for all or the majority of the financial grants management's responsibilities. If you have a very small staff, there are ways to ensure separation of duties. For instance, members of your board or commission may take some responsibility. Additionally, it's really important to remember that some tasks don't require financial background. That can be completed by staff outside the fiscal team.

As you look at the example on your screen, you're able to see a sample of the tasks that might be completed by your financial staff. We've taken the liberty of identifying where there might be opportunities of other staff members to also be supportive in this role. There may be times when the executive director is able to lend support, or the administrative staff, as well as your board members and/or commissioners.

Having this visual is a reminder of the team, that we work together to achieve success and to ensure compliance, and who needs to communicate with each other about the award. Remember that your authorized rep may receive most CNC official documentation, and has a responsibility to share that information with others. All of this communication is important to ensure the responsibility for who has the effective grants management, which lies with all of us.

What do we document? As we entered into our day to day, some individuals had questions specific to documentation, so this is for you. What are the things that we document, you say? Everything! It's important that everything you want to count as part of the grant records, all grant-related expenses, including both cash and in-kind portions of the grantee share or match, must be documented by clear documentation.

We want to track incoming information, to review information, to provide historical evidence, to provide evidence of accomplishments, to prepare for an audit. And because the most important thing, if it's not documented, then what? I hear you in the chat. It did not happen. That's absolutely right.

Now we ask you to use the chat feature to note some of those transactions that you believe should be documented. Yes! Payroll. Supplies. That's an important one. Kimberly, you are so wise. Yes, match is important. Review of PERs and FFRs, actual staff time, equipment. Indeed, travel. Monthly expenditures. In kind. Yes. That's absolutely correct.

Again, if it's not documented, then it didn't happen. We want to ensure that your documentation is sufficient enough to show verification of expenses, of your member hours, of eligibilities, records for the grant budget to actual reconciliation, support for future budget development, historical evidence that is required by your organization's policies

and procedures, in the grants terms and conditions, or necessary for audits, and evidence of your grant-related accomplishments. These are requirements. They're not optional.

And so now we're going to talk about documentation, okay? And so documentation comes in many forms, so we may have hard copies, which are actual paper in our hands, purchase orders, invoices, time sheets, vouchers of various sorts. There are also internal forces, and so earlier in the chat, individuals shared that's one of their fundamentals, is the ease of accessing electronic information, and so having those information that's stored on your organization's server, on your CDs or flash drives, are examples of soft copy.

And then we have internal communication, those things that are within your organization, and then external communication, so those resources that come from your bank, from vendors, from customers, or even sub-recipients.

And then there are many benefits from having accurate documentation, so can the documentation support the values of the goods or services, as well as meet the performance of the program objective? You want to make sure that they support whatever claim that you are making.

And so, in your resources, there are two documentations that we have provided you for future references. One of the questions that we get commonly are, how do we document our match? We saw that in our conversation in our chat, and so we want to be able to provide these tools that you can reference at a future time.

And so one of those documents is actually from the Arkansas Commission, and when you look at that document, that is how they capture the match information that they, then, roll up into their reports. And so this is just a cover sheet, and then we did not burden you with all of the supportive documentation that came with it. We just provided you with sample, so that you're able to see that this is a good way, that you might also adopt with your organization, on how to track and to receive the information from sub-recipients.

The second document that you will see is actually one from one of our tribal grantees, and it shows an Excel spreadsheet where they actually track their match, along with all of their expenditures, on a monthly basis, and then they're able to ensure that that match, that information that comes from their program director, is then provided to their finance officers for when the reporting is done on a quarterly or monthly basis, as required within their organization.

When you look at indirect and administrative costs, there's not necessarily a requirement to document that. It depends upon how you're tracking it in your budget, and what you're actually claiming as indirect costs. Typically, those things are actually laid out in your letter that you get from your cognizant agency, so your agency pretty much determines which things are included in that particular rate. The documentation that is required for your indirect cost rate is really driven by your notice that comes from your cognizant agency.

If you have additional questions about your indirect costs, please, I encourage you to stick around at the end, and we're glad to have more discussion with you about that.

Documenting staff time. Everybody's got to do it, and so documenting staff time is critical for staff to document their time charge, both to their federal and grantee share of their budget. It's particularly important for staff working on multiple projects to document their actual time spent to multiple projects, as shown above. Time sheets are no longer required, but you must be able to track time to a particular function if charged less than 100% to the award.

Time and effort reports should align with your policy. Personnel record documentation should include a supervisor approved timekeeping record, a payroll register, personnel file with salary and wage information, canceled checks, and direct deposit schedules.

As we look at our example on the screen, you can see, there, that they identify the various categories from their grants by numbers. Within your system, you may identify them by the actual grant name, and both are allowable. But what you're able to see is that, at various times at this pay period, this individual was working on several different projects, and that's the important thing that you want to be able to capture.

Criminal history checks. As previously stated, the terms and conditions include directions for conducting compliant national service criminal history checks. These checks, often referred to as [inaudible 00:43:14], are a huge area of vulnerability for CNC grantees. It's important that you take steps to conduct the checks on time, every time. As you saw, there has been a series, in this series of training, that there was an advance level CNC course. There are also many resources available in the Knowledge Network related to criminal history checks.

For the purposes of our conversation today, criminal history checks is a perfect example of why documentation is important. It's a way for you to say yes you did, or that you did not initiate the check. It also allows you to document the date or the time at which these checks were completed, so that is the piece that we really want for individuals to be aware of, as it pertains to criminal history checks.

In the resources you also have a checklist that has also been utilized by one of the grantees that they use to train

their staff on how to conduct criminal history checks to ensure that they're completed on time. Not just sometimes but every time.

In addition to the information in the Knowledge Network please know that you could go to nationalservice.gov/resources/criminal-history-check for more information. Oh, I should do commercials.

Now we're going to look at a federal financial report also referred to as an FFR. This form may or may not look familiar to you but is one of the two FFRs required of your grant. You may not do it but find out who does and confirm that they understand what's required of the financial reporting.

This information is prepared with information from your organization's accounting system. You must review and reconcile the document to ensure accuracy. You also have to have proper documentation. It's also critical that these reports be submitted on time.

All direct CNCS grantees must submit two different financial reports. I want to take a few minutes to highlight the difference between the two FFRs. The federal financial report submitted through eGrants, generally on a semi-annual basis, provides information about the program expenditures. It includes information on both the CNCS and recipient share of expenditures. CNCS share that is included is unliquidated obligations and any program income the FFR reports ... Oops. I'm sorry, and any program income.

The FFR submitted to HHS through the payment management system reports that program's disbursement on a quarterly basis. Please make sure that you submit your report on time for delinquent reports may result in CNCS putting your funds on hold or affect your eligibility for future funding. If you have a legitimate reason to request an extension please direct it to the correct individual. Your CNCS grants officer, not your program officer, may approve extension requests for FFRs. You should contact the payment management center, not your grants officer, for issues related to the PMX report.

Regardless of whether you're a direct grantee submitting one of these reports or providing a financial report to your organization's management or board, the same basic principle of financial reporting applies. Prepare your reports for information from your accounting system. Review and reconcile. Confirm the proper documentation. And again, submit all reports on time. Most importantly, regardless of whether your report cost is part of the CNCS or grantee share, you need to make sure that they all include allowable costs.

Great, any questions about those pieces before we move on?

Thea Becton: No ma'am.

Barbara Reynolds: Thea and Tracy, it looks like there are a couple of good questions in the chat box.

Tracey Seabolt: Right.

Barbara Reynolds: You guys want to scroll back?

Tracey Seabolt: Lou Anne is, whoops. No, down further. All right. What happens if an FFR is due. Year end close is not finished? Go ahead.

Thea Becton: So, typically there is additional time extended during closeout for the completions of FFRs. There are many times during the closeout period where we recognize that there may be needs for adjustment. During the time of closeout just stay in regular communication with your grants officer. Again, if your deadline is approaching be sure to reach out to your grants officer for an extension if additional information is needed.

Tracey Seabolt: Kimberly I think that also speaks to your question about the expenses not necessarily being paid for. That's where you have your unliquidated obligations. Again, you'll have some of that catch time, too, during the closeout period.

What was Lillian's question? How many days after the period do we have to submit our reports? Thirty. Thirty days under a normal reporting period 90 days for the end of the grant.

Thea Becton: That's all stated in the terms and conditions, is that correct?

Tracey Seabolt: Correct. [crosstalk 00:49:37] No, go ahead.

Barbara Reynolds: Yes, I would just say it louder in case you guys didn't hear me. The exact dates and the number of days and everything related to your FFRs are listed in your grant terms and conditions.

Tracey Seabolt: Jenny, your question about unallowable costs. You will find those in 2CFR. There is a whole little section in there. If you've got a category that you want to check, is this allowable? That is your go to spot to find out about unallowable costs.

Thea Becton: Kimberly, regarding your physical closing of your organization, could I invite you to please stay at the end so that we can answer your questions more specifically? Because some of those are very specific to the circumstances of your closing. We invite you to please stay at the end and we'll address your question.

Tracey Seabolt: We are going to move on and talk about some of the challenges that could cause your foundation to crumble. We want to make sure that you're able to recognize those so that you are able to keep that foundation standing upright. We don't want your program to go crashing down this cliff and into the ocean.

Let's start with talking about inadequate policies. Thea spent a lot of time talking about policies and procedures and making sure that you're following them. What if you have them and maybe they're just not up to snuff yet? Let's take a look at what might be in your policy and procedures. Let's say you have this policy for preparing your FFRs and it says, "The FFRs will be completed as required by the funder."

Not a bad policy, right? It talks about what's going to happen. But what could we put in here to make this a little stronger of a policy? It's good but we could make it better. So now we've revised it. It says, "Who is going to prepare the FFRs, which kind of preparation we're doing, so it's the eGrants and the payment management system and it talks about the specific circumstances. So it's in accordance with the grant terms and conditions. This is definitely better, don't you think? It gives you a little bit more information. But it could be even better than that.

Let's take a look at this next version. The grants officer, so we get a specific individual, is going to prepare all of the FFRs, so all of them, on a quarterly semi-annual basis and that's going to depend. So now you have a timeline of when these will occur and in accordance with the grant's terms and conditions which we had before. But then all of the reports and supportive documentations are now going to be reviewed by that finance director that previously was the one preparing the FFR, before it's submitted.

This is also establishing some internal controls. You've got a level of approval. You don't have to worry about, "It's just on me. I'm out there preparing this but now I'm preparing it, somebody else is double checking my work." That's one thing that when we were talking about the FFRs, yes we want to make sure that you're submitting them on time but we also want to make sure you're submitting them accurately. It's just as unfortunate for us to have to return a report for you all to revise it as it is for us to say that it came in late. So you want to take the time to submit the information accurately. Having these kinds of checks will give you that opportunity. Then you've got your best policy now that's going to guide that work.

One of the things that we look at when we have grantees that call us and they'll ask us, "How do I do X, Y or Z?" and the answer to the question is always, "Well, what are your policies and procedures say? Right here, this is telling you exactly how you would complete that FFR."

Let's look at some unallowable costs. That's something that as I recall from the beginning of our conversation that came up a couple of times. It just came up even more recently as we were going through some of those fundamentals. Let's go back and look at another Notice of Grant Award. Again you have in here your performance period, your budget period. You'll see the program's start date is October 1, 2018.

And lo and behold you get this invitation from the wonderful Barbara Reynolds that says, "You're invited to come to the AmeriCorps Symposium." And look the Symposium start date is September 12 and you certainly want to send your staff to the symposium. So can you charge travel costs to this award? Yes, no, yes? No, yes, no, yes? Hopefully you all saw the poll come up. We want to see your answers. Can you charge these costs? The Symposium start is September 12. Your Notice of Grant Award says your program and budget period starts October 1.

It looks like about half of you have answered the poll. We're going to give you a couple seconds more. Okay, last call to weigh in on the polls. Keeps going back and forth between slightly over half one way and slightly over the other way. And we're still back to being about half. Well, half of you are going to jail.

Okay, we're not going to send you to jail, but that question about unallowable costs you just found an answer to that. You could not use your grant fund to support your staff attendance at the Symposium under the information that we have in front of us. If your budget period starts October 1st, that is the first date that you can charge any costs related to this grant. Now if you've got other grants operating you could certainly use those. That's one option.

The other option is that you can ask for pre-award approval of cost. You do that by contacting your grants officer and say, "We would like to request approval for pre-award costs beginning on September 11th", perhaps, so that you have a day to travel, "So that our staff can attend the AmeriCorps Symposium." And then your grants officer would take care of getting the approval for that. It's a pretty simple process to request that. It is exactly for these kinds of circumstances, for training, for recruitment, those kinds of things. The only thing that you cannot do is charge any member related cost to it.

Okay. I don't see any questions related to that so we're going to move on and talk just ever so briefly again about criminal history checks. In this situation you see a sample member service agreement. This member's term of service begins July 23, 2018. You as the project director conduct a national sex offender search. That search, as you see here, was performed July 24, 2018 at 12:14 a.m. Is this is a compliant criminal history check search?

Okay, those are the kind of poll results we like to see. No, this is not compliant. Thank you all for giving the correct answer. Again, this is the reason why we want to make sure you all have strong policies and procedures. We don't want your staff to say, "Oh, I've got a new member starting. I have to do this criminal history check thing. Oh, yeah, I have to do this sex offender check, whatever that is. Okay, I'm going to do that."

We want to make sure you understand the timing and the process for conducting the check and documenting the check. That's where those policies and procedures and the related documentation become so very critical, because that can be the difference between any of those costs related to that member and their service hours being allowable or not.

Those are just a couple of challenges and really those are ones that are frequently found in IG audits and in some of the programmatic and fiscal staff monitoring that the NPS conducts. We share those to raise awareness so that you're prepared to establish protocols and avoid those challenges. Again, your policies, your procedures, separation of duties, all of those ensure some checks and balances, keep you on track, tell you what you need to do, when you need to do it, how you need to do it. And keep you as much as possible out of any hot water.

We did include in the resources a handout that is a listing of frequent Inspector General Audit findings. We update that listing on a fairly regular basis but it does not change a whole lot. If you take a look at this it will give you a heads up of here's some areas that I really need to make sure that I have covered in my policies and procedures. That way you are definitely far more prepared to manage your program and for any auditing and monitoring that would come into your organization.

All right. I'm going to pause there, see if there are any additional questions related to what we've covered thus far. Okay, I don't see anything coming in. As Thea referenced earlier, though, we're going to stay online a little bit after we finish here today just to answer any specific questions that you all might have that might not be appropriate for the whole group. We'll have a little bit of after-class hours once we wrap up here.

As we do wrap up I want to assure you all that you don't need to panic if you're starting from scratch. If you feel like you really are at rock bottom, that's okay. That's the foundation of what can be tremendous success. You might find yourself in a homeless shelter one day and then writing best-selling novels and movies and all kinds of craziness the next day. So don't feel like, "Oh my gosh, I don't have any of this and I really am starting from the bare bones and I'm terrified." That's just the opportunity for you all to build a very, very strong foundation and run a very strong program.

Within the resources there's also a link for a variety of online financial management courses and other resources. They will definitely assist you as you begin or continue your AmeriCorps journey. I encourage you to check out some of those resources. In addition the Office of Grants Management will also lead a grants administration track at the upcoming AmeriCorps Symposium. I encourage you to come to any of our sessions there. You can learn not just from the information we're sharing but also from others that are in those sessions. Again, as always, I encourage you to reach out to your grants officer if you have any other questions related to your grants administration.

With that, and seeing no other questions that have come in I am going to pass it on to, or back to Barbara.

Barbara Reynolds: Thank you so much Tracey and Thea and thank you guys very much for your great questions. Definitely as Tracey said, please hang out with us a little bit more in the chat box if you have questions. I just want to turn our attention to wrapping up for today. As I said, we definitely want your feedback on today's presentation. Please go over to the web links and click on the evaluation form. It's just five little questions. It'll take you a very, very short amount of time but we'd really appreciate your feedback on today's webinar. As I said earlier we will post the recording for this presentation on the Knowledge Network, probably in a couple weeks. It takes us a little bit of time to do the conversion for the recording and get the materials up there but you'll be able to find it on the Knowledge Network.

I want to do a quick promo for our next webinar coming up on August 9th. As I said, we'll be looking at AmeriCorps member orientation and training and all the good stuff that we together with that.

Finally, just today again, I want to say thank you all very much. Thanks to Thea and Tracey for your great comments. Hopefully some of the things you saw today, the information you heard, the questions and answers as well as the many resources that you have on the web links, hopefully all of that will help you as you're moving on down the money trail. Thank you guys so much. We're going to stop the audio portion of today's presentation now, but we will be online for just a few more minutes this afternoon if you want to hang out and chat in the chat box. So thank you very much. Have a good afternoon.