AmeriCorps Staff Development Series

Orientation for New Commission Staff

Text Transcript

Barbara Reynolds: Hi, good, afternoon. This is Barbara Reynolds again with CNCS. I'm going to kick off our presentation today. Again, I want to thank you for logging on and dialing in for today's presentation on Orienting New State Service Commission staff. Before we go into the formal part of our presentation, just want to take one last minute, if you haven't already, go ahead and fill out the poll. We're just looking to get a sense for folks who are participating today, how long you've been working in your commission? So, we have just a few more seconds if folks want to answer that poll question, that will really help us out.

Alright, counting it down 4, 3, 2, 1. All right. I'm going to end the poll and then we can see the results here in front of us. This is really helpful, thank you. As we anticipated, I hope as we promoted for today, we're really gearing today's content towards new commission staff. So, those of you who are with us and who've been at your commission for less than one year welcome, of course. Welcome to the commission and the AmeriCorps party. We are also hopeful today that the content will be useful if you've been at your commission for more than one year.

All right, so before we jump into the content, I do want to do a quick technology check. You should have a few features in front of you right now in this presentation platform. Just below the slides, the slide that you see technology check on, there's a box called web links. In that box are links to the presentation, the content for today's webinar on the Knowledge Network. You'll also see links to an updated glossary of terms that will reference during today's presentation. And then finally, you'll see the link to an evaluation form, a feedback form for today's presentation. I just want to draw your attention to those web links and then obviously really encourage you to make use of that evaluation form here at the end.

As you guys can see on the screen, and I do just want to let you know verbally we are recording today's presentation. So, if you don't want to be recorded, please log off but we are recording this, and we'll post it on the Knowledge Network along with the supporting materials in June. And then finally, I just want to make sure that you all have access to and are able to use the chat box during today's presentation. You know, that your phone lines are muted while the different speakers are going through our content. But we will keep the chat box open.

We have it open now and it'll be open throughout the presentation. So, if you could please, just take a second and type of short howdy, how you doing, how's it going, what's up? Some sort of greeting in that chat box to your colleagues. That'll make all of us know that you are able to use that, also just gives you a chance to say hello to the folks in the room. Great. Thank you so much. I see some his, some hey you, high all, thank you very much. Yep, keep the chat moving. This is a webinar version of going around the circle and saying hello to your colleagues.

All right, so as I said, we will keep this chat box, it's open throughout this presentation. If there's anything that you hear, any comment you have that you just want to capture, please feel free to chat in. We'll be monitoring it off and on. And then we'll use the chat box feature to open up for questions as we move through the content at definitely the end of our session.

Okay, today's session is one of a series of staff development webinars. So, AmeriCorps staff, meaning commission staff as well as AmeriCorps program staff that CNCS is leading, generally as you can see, we hope that this series and that each webinar within the series will help focus on and build core knowledge, knowledge around core program and grant management issues. We hope that you'll be able to take the next hour or so away from your busy day and really focus on a longer term issue and something that's very important.

As I said, this is part of the series for 2018. Today we're talking about orienting new commission staff, and then next month we'll be inviting new program colleagues to come in for a similar orientation. Then you can see the remainder of the year, the topics that we will be covering. For our target audience today, you guys know or you saw the marketing materials, hopefully, as I said, we are really talking today as if everyone who's listening to us are new to the AmeriCorps and new to your commission and folks who also have responsibility for orienting new employees. Again, we hope it's really immediately useful if you're brand new, or it will be useful for you as you work with new staff at your commission.

We wanted to focus today's presentation on a couple of things that I think we don't talk a lot about at CNCS. The first is just what it means through our eyes, through CNCS' eyes to work at a state commission, what is it that we expect as an agency as a funder for AmeriCorps at the federal level? What do we expect of our state colleagues that our state commissions in terms of knowledge and skills?

So we're going to talk about that today, and we're going to talk also about how we hope for we would propose that new commission staff would be oriented to their work. We know everyone's not going to learn everything and be able to do everything all at the same time. We're not in the matrix after all, but we definitely want to give you some ideas or some thoughts that we've had about what new commission staff should learn first, what's most important, and then how to phase that in. Finally, today, we have on with us, several of our colleagues from around the country who are going to share some of the lessons they've learned and their best practices.

I'm the first speaker today, I'm Barbara Reynolds as you can see on the side in front of you. Here with me at HQ is my esteemed colleague Beth Binkley. You can also see Beth's photo here. We have been with the corporation about the same amount of time. We both started in 2013. Beth and I both come from a background of work at the state commission level. Beth was in the great state of South Carolina and I worked in Maryland. We both worked with AmeriCorps programs before working with our state commissions. So, together we bring a range of experiences and knowledge I think to this work today. I know for myself and I think this is true for Beth as well, we're very passionate about wanting new commission colleagues to really feel welcome and well oriented to the work. We know how hard the work is because we've done it at the commissions, and we know how much we really want to help bring you into the fold.

We are your CNCS presenters today. We have a number of things we're going to go through as I said, we have several colleagues on the phone with us as well. For example here, from Amber Martin-Jahn in the great state of Washington, and then we'll review ... Beth and I will talk you through some of those key concepts around knowledge and skills that we think of and we expect for commission colleagues. We'll talk about some of that phases of learning for new staff, and then spend a few minutes really talking about cultivating our relationships, the CNCS relationship with commissions and with commission staff. Then we'll wrap up with, again, a couple of great colleagues from Massachusetts sharing their stories of how folks get oriented to the Massachusetts commission. We have some resources to share with you, and then we'll have Q&A at the end of our session as well.

I mentioned this at the beginning, I think we've said this in the written material. Again, I just want to remind you guys the slides for today's presentations are currently posted on the Knowledge Network. If you go to that link that's in the web links, if you haven't done so already, if you want to see the slides as we're going through them, you have access to that right now. And then as I said, we'll have this recording up in just a couple weeks.

To kick us off today, we're going to ... We're delighted and delighted to welcome and introduce our first guest speaker, Amber Martin-Jahn, as you can see, is the executive director of Serve Washington Now. She just began in that role in February of this year. Prior to going to Washington, you guys may know, Amber was in Nevada, working with Nevada and leading Nevada volunteers since 2013. So, I think she was with the commission there about as long as Beth and I have been at the CNCS. Amber has a tremendous backgrounds in social work and journalism, and I know is a great leader in national service.

We also think she has a really interesting story to tell having just left the lead of one commission and moved into a new commission. So, we asked her to kick us off today and talk a little bit about how she got oriented in the state of Washington. So, Amber, please unmute your phone and take it away.

Amber Martin-Jahn: Thanks Barbara. So Barbara spoke a little bit about what is unique, or why I'm asked to share how I've gotten oriented in Washington. But I think just first I'd like to acknowledge that a change within the network brings its own complication. At the same time that I was figuring out how to onboard someone in Nevada very quickly, or leave resources for someone in Nevada very quickly, I was also trying to figure out how to learn an entirely new state. It meant that transition planning included answering some questions about how am I prepared to step up or step back what things are no longer my business. But it also meant when I came into Washington, I didn't feel like I needed as much of the rules or the regulation overview that new commission staff really needs to have because I know a lot of that.

I also knew that between these types of webinars that CNCS offers and the program development series through America service Commission's, that the new person in Nevada would have ample resources. So, I really focused my transition planning and getting oriented in Washington to emphasizing what are the next steps for Washington, and how do I understand the Commission's organizational positioning. Because you'll learn later in this webinar a little bit about commissions roles from CNCS' perspective, and I think that always introduces this gray area of how do you actually understand the partnership and the grantee dual messages. Then what is your role with that as commission staff?

Just knowing that, I think what I would share is that my approach to Washington was to say, I don't know the state and I don't know the programs. And if I am going to be an advocate for what the needs of Washington state are, and if I'm going to be an advocate and a proponent of Washington programs, one of my first transition goals needs to be to meet programs and meet the commissioners and meet other key partners. For my transition learning, I set up that within the first 90 days, I would visit every Washington program and I have I think three or four left that I haven't had one on one time with. I've made good progress with 16, 17 so programs. It's taken a while.

I set one on one meetings with every commissioner and I have five of those left to do. Then I made sure that I did key stakeholder meetings with people like the CNCS state office, the RSVP Directors Organization, 501 Commons, which is a volunteer training provider among other things in our state, the Nonprofit Association and the Volunteer Centers Association.

Transitioning for me wasn't just about learning rules and compliance or just about reading the reports, but about really understanding my role as a state commission and how to move us forward in meeting our objectives. I feel like that might be a little bit distinct from what a new staff member would need to learn. So, I don't want to spend too much time on it. But I think it's important for all of us to remember our role is both representing our state and in meeting the expectations as a state commission, and sometimes those can be competing.

I did have a couple of ahas in the learning process both leaving Nevada and entering Washington. I think as you are learning what you need to know to do your job, it would be helpful if you set up the tools that are useful to use so that they are in place if or when you decide to transition to the next step. I think I might have in some cases over or underestimated the resources that I had in place for staff to handle things that I was involved in. So, I would rethink through that, transitioning and kind of test some assumptions about what is really needed.

But really those are the key points for me in terms of getting oriented in Washington. It was about learning the state. I think Barbara, I think that's really what you wanted me to speak to was my role in Washington, not so much the tactical tools that I need to know to do my job as an executive director of the commission.

Barbara Reynolds: Yeah, Amber, Exactly. I thought as you identified, I think your situation was a really interesting and unique one just having had so much knowledge and expertise with the commission functions that you, as you said, you really focus your energy on the state of Washington and all of the new stuff there to learn and the new people to meet. I think that that's really helpful. That's exactly what we were looking for to kick us off.

Amber Martin-Jahn: Perfect. Thank you.

Barbara Reynolds: Sure. Thank you. I do want to say while you were speaking, there's a shout out in the chat box that you also put on a fantastic regional training center. I just want to make sure that you saw that.

Amber Martin-Jahn: Well, I do. Thank you Diane.

Barbara Reynolds: A little recognition for you. Amber, thank you so much for your remarks today. I hope you can stay on and listen and be available if folks have questions, we're going to jump into some of the content. But then again, just really want to thank you for kicking us off with your story.

Amber Martin-Jahn: Absolutely. Thank you.

Barbara Reynolds: Great. So again, Amber, thank you so much. I think Amber mentioned this a couple of different times, and I want to just draw some connections as we start to dig into some of this conversation about new commission staff orientation and the CNCS relationship. As you know, and as Amber acknowledged as well, State Service Commissions really have a special role in the delivery of AmeriCorps State national resources, frankly in the leadership of AmeriCorps around our country. Commissions are both as Amber said, both partners with CNCS in the grant making business. You guys know as you provide grants in your states, and then you're also CNCS as prime grantees. We have this this unique relationship as both partners and grantees.

I think it is, as Amber said, it can become a gray area sometimes in navigating our relationships with each other and this is one of the reasons why we really wanted to focus on this in our presentation today. In addition it's always important for me, and I believe this is true for commissions as well, that we acknowledge that many commissions oversee programs and initiatives that are not connected to CNCS, right? You guys do a lot more than just CNCS business or just AmeriCorps. You may be designated in your state to serve as the disaster response lead, you may be part of the workforce development approach or initiative within your state, lots of different state level priorities. Some of them as Amber noted, sometimes those may compete in terms of timing or energy with CNCS.

Certainly, each commission no matter what your state level responsibilities are, even the way you're structured and the priorities you have for your AmeriCorps partnership and your AmeriCorps grantee business, it's going to vary.

But for today's purposes, we really are going to hone in on these AmeriCorps relationships. Since this is across everything, what we all share in common.

As I said, we're going to talk briefly about what CNCS expects from new state commissions staff at whatever level. So, if it's the executive director like Amber, if it's the financial officer, program officer, training officer at your commission, the exact knowledge and skills will vary of course, depending on the job. But we do have some overarching expectations that I think are really important to convey. I want to talk through those quickly as you can see on the slide, there are a few. I'm going to talk about knowledge. Everyone needs to know everything all the time, of course. But here are some of the broad categories of course that we look to commission staff to build their knowledge over time. Obviously, we want you to know CNCS. We want you to learn as quickly as you can, and as much as you need to re-learn and be reoriented. We want you to know the CNCS mission, how we're structured, how our communications work. We want commission staff to understand the national service laws that govern our AmeriCorps grant making and other business that we do together.

We of course want you to understand the CNCS budget and how we fit into the federal government and the federal budget process. Then of course, we want you to ... As our partners in AmeriCorps grant making, we want you to know and help us implement all of the rules and regulations, funding opportunities, et cetera. Kind of all the nitty gritty in doing our business together.

Next, of course, going further and not just knowing the CNCS overview. We're also, of course, wanting folks to be incredibly fluent with AmeriCorps specifically. The history, missions of AmeriCorps, how programs cycles work, how programs can best be supported and members can be supported. We want commissions to know and continuously improve their knowledge of best practices for program development and members support. We want commission staff to be really, really comfortable and familiar with all of the resources that exist all over the place to support this work. We want you to know how to support diverse programs, and then certainly know how to connect programs to others in your state as well as in the broader national network.

The next category in terms of knowledge that we are recognizing here is to know your commission. So, your specific organization obviously. Each state commission has, you have your own awarded grants through the corporations. We want you to know what those approved grants are inside and out. Again, as appropriate. I think depending on your position on the commission, that's your job. It'll be more or less appropriate wanting to know the budgets again as it makes sense for your job. We want you to get to know, as Amber identified, your commissioners or your commission boards as you're getting oriented to your new commission or you're bringing folks in who are new to your staff. Just as Amber described to you, setting up meetings that's appropriate, getting folks to really get to know the board itself.

I think another piece of knowing your commission puzzle is understanding the history of your commission. Each of our state commissions or partners around the country have evolved over these last few decades in different ways. Your story in your particular state is going to be very different than Amber's story in Washington, or Amber’s story when she was in Nevada. I think getting to know the history, the kind of evolution of the commission that you work in, your context and your connections within the state. That's another piece of the knowledge puzzle.

The next category, of course, is getting some of the great people that you fund in your state, the subgrantees. Just as I mentioned a minute ago about learning all of the grants requirements that the commission exists and manages, we also expect that our commission colleagues will know and really help us support subgrantees. So you'll know all of the grant requirements, and you'll be helping to stay on top of those. You're going to understand the budgets, the performance measurements, the evaluation plans, et cetera, for your subgrantees. How they're collecting their data, how they're managing that. You'll know your subgrantees as individuals. You'll know their own stories and their own evolution over time. And then we hope that you'll also have a sense of your overall funding portfolio and how its evolved to expand or contract or just change over time as well.

For the final piece of the knowledge puzzle, of course as Amber explained, in many, many ways, of course, we really look to our commission colleagues to be experts in your particular state. You are in your communities, you are working closely with all the organizations that provide services and lead different communities in your state. The corporation really, we look to you in your state to understand and convey information around what's going on, what are the needs in your community, who are the leaders, what are the institutions. If you know or as you're meeting notable alumni, we like to hear about that, great alumni that are in your state. And then obviously, we look to our commission colleagues to be very, very up to speed on the political climate, in terms of the support from the governors, support from your legislature, et cetera. We really know from our experience that is for many commissions, because they work in state government that is going to be a great source of knowledge that they have.

I know those were pretty quick. We walked through this pretty quickly. And as I said, there is no expectation that every new commission staff member knows all of this stuff immediately. We know you're going to build it over time, but I just wanted to run through those, and now we're going to transition a little bit to talk about not just what to know, but what we hope and expect our commission colleagues to be able to do. So, I'm going to turn it over to Beth.

Beth Binkley: Thank you, Barbara. Now that Barbara has outlined the knowledge puzzle, as she termed it, we're going to move into what skills commission staff should have. These are broad categories and they represent overall categories of skills that CNCS expects commission staff to acquire and continue to develop over time. The list is not comprehensive and it is not expected that commission staff will be able to do all of this at once. This list does focus on the AmeriCorps functions of the commission role.

As key CNCS partners and leaders in national service, commission staff should be able to champion national service relentlessly as you see on the slide. Which would include promoting national service in your state, and promoting the national service brand. Staff should also be able to enforce national service laws, regulations, and ensure compliance. Staff should constantly strive for continuous improvement at commission and subgrantee levels, be able to provide high quality training and technical assistance to potential and existing subgrantees including being able to navigate CNCS staff and online resources as well as the broader commission and national service network. Staff should be able to take in and use a lot of complex information, manage conflicting information and competing deadlines and translate CNCS information to state stakeholders which could include commission staff commissioners, or board members, state leadership, subgrantees, citizens, AmeriCorps members and alumni.

Staff should be able to thoroughly document and maintain records to support all grant activities, expenditures and actions taken and be able to produce accurate documentation upon demand. Finally, commission staff should be able to work effectively with ambiguity. A good example of this is one that many of us have gone through year after year, and that is the unknowns of federal budget decisions and timings.

Moving on to possible phases of learning. There is no exact science to determine the best way to orient new staff to your commission, but there are a number of factors that will impact how you do this, whether it's the amount of time you have, new staff learning style, your own teaching, coaching style, your work environment and duties specific to the job. Based on CNCS experience, both from our role as a federal funder and our staff experience that programs and commissions prior to joining CNCS, we have some proposed topics to include in the first week at commission employees on the job as well as things to cover in the first month. Again, our focus here is exclusively on commission staff who are funded by CNCS and who have a role in AmeriCorps grant management.

Week one topics include; prohibited and an unallowable activities in general and how they apply to commissions and subgrantees. Staff time rolls, grant allocations and timesheet procedures, and how to access information, whether from the program officer or grants officer, setting up your eGrants accounts, getting usernames and passwords, getting on CNCS and state national email list, and navigating the CNCS website and Knowledge Network.

Once your commission staff makes it past the first week, where do you go next in the AmeriCorps learning journey? Here on this slide are recommended topics to cover fully in month one. These topics fall heavily on the structure of CNCS, AmeriCorps grant making, and what it's like to closely work with CNCS. These are recommendations for month one content. Each commission of course will adjust the schedule to best meet the needs of the new employee. In the first month, be sure new employees become very comfortable with the CNCS organizational chart and leadership, including how the different CNCS units interact and what it means to the commission.

Be sure that they are comfortable with the CNCS staff contacts, acronyms and terminology, types of prime state national grantees, the types of grants, the CNCS grant making cycle, and the CNCS relationship.

Now, we want to walk quickly through some of the content of the items listed under the month one orientation topics. We know in real time, you would linger much longer on these topics and these are only recommendations for how to handle this material. Each state again will tailor the format and content of new staff orientation as appropriate. CNCS is an independent federal government agency. This is a simple version of the CNCS organizational chart as of April 2018. You can access a printable version on the CNCS website. CNCS is led by a bipartisan Board of Directors whose members are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The board sets the overall policy and direction for the agency and its programs and provides guidance to the agency's Chief Executive Officer, who was also nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The CEO oversees the agency which includes about 500 employees operating throughout the United States and its territories.

In this chart, you can see the major units within CNCS. Commissions will be in frequent communication with the state and national grants management and the trust. You'll see the program officer, grants officer, and trust officer highlighted on the organizational chart.

All commissions have three key points of contact to CNCS. What I just mentioned, the program officer, the grants officer, and the National Service trust officer. Your program officer or PO as we like to call it, is your primary point of contact with CNCS. He or she will support you in the implementation of your commission responsibilities and help resolve issues that arise concerning your grants. POs review grantee progress reports, monitor grantees for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements, and also work closely with other CNCS units to provide support to commissions and can help you connect to other CNCS staff and units as necessary. It is critical that you have regular contact with your PO including but not limited to a regular schedule check in call each month.

Grants officers or GOs work in the CNCS Office of Grants Management and are responsible for fiscal issues concerning your grants. GOs review your federal financial reports or FFRs and monitor financial management systems for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. Again, please copy your PO on correspondence sent to Grants Officers said that they are aware of ongoing discussions.

Finally, trust officers work in the National Service Trust, which administers the Eli Siegel Education Awards that AmeriCorps members receive upon successful completion of the term of service. Trust officers are the primary contacts for issues related to the Education Award, such as forbearance, education awards payments, and student loan interest payments. Please, again, we are reiterating this for the third time, copy your PO on correspondence send to trust officers so that they are aware of ongoing discussions, very important to remember.

So, as you know we have been using a lot of terminology and acronyms throughout this webinar. Listed here are key terminology and acronyms. So, for new staff navigating the maze of Ameri speak can be a big challenge. We do use them a lot to help bring new staff up to speed, commissions may provide a glossary of key terms and acronyms or some other type of cheat sheet that staff can reference as new employees.

For a basic new employee orientation, it is a great idea for you to explain these terms early and often. A glossary is posted on the Knowledge Network to help you with this orientation task, and you can also access it via the link in the Connect, in the webinar that we are in currently.

Okay, so we're going to move into types of prime grantees. I believe that was probably one of our key terminologies that is good for your staff to learn early and often. AmeriCorps State National provides grants to nonprofits, faith based and secular community based organizations, government agencies, Indian tribes and institutions of higher education. So, there are three types of AmeriCorps State National prime grantees; national direct grantees, or multi state AmeriCorps programs, programs managed by Indian tribes in US territories, and State Service Commission's. National direct grantees or multi state AmeriCorps programs are those programs that have operating sites and place AmeriCorps members in service in at least two states. The headquarters are parent office of the program applies to CNCS directly for AmeriCorps funds, and manages the program and grant funds in the various locations

An Indian tribe is a federally recognized Indian tribe, band, nation or other organized group of community including any native village, regional corporation, village corporation or a tribal organization that is controlled, sanction or chartered by one of the entities mentioned earlier. As you know, state commissions are boards of 15 to 25 individuals nominated and appointed by a state's governor. The commission oversees the implementation of national and community service and volunteer initiatives in a particular state, U.S territory or the District of Columbia. Most commissions employ a small professional staff to manage the AmeriCorps grant portfolio and direct other state initiatives. State commissions provide funding to single state AmeriCorps programs through an annual grant competition. State commissions also provide feedback to CNCS on the national or multi state programs operating in their states as part of the annual grant competitive cycle.

I'm going to turn it back over to Barbara.

Barbara Reynolds: Great, thank you so much Beth. We're tag-teaming this. This is obviously some of maybe the drier content going through definitions and terminologies certainly. That said, we know this is all super, super important so we do want to spend some time on it and share with you. I'm going to talk just quickly about our CNCS grant making cycle. Again, I think this is great to hear from the CNCS through the CNCS lens and then think about it for your particular state and what this means, how this process works for you.

As you can see on the slide in front of you in general, since we are a federal grant maker, we have five key steps in the federal grant making process. The guidelines for grant submission and the youth of our AmeriCorps State and

National Funds are detailed and described each year with a release of a magic document called, The Notice of Funding Opportunity, or NOFO, pronounced NOFO.

That comes out typically in the early fall, late summer, I think the timing will vary a little bit. Along with the NOFO, CNCS has also publishes detailed grant application instructions. So, commissions will see this information and translate that for your state applicants or your subgrantee applicants. Again, the applications, the NOFO comes out late summer, early fall, and then the applications for the competitive grants cycle have been due in January, the last few years.

After we receive the competitive grant applications or any of the grant applications, there's a review process called GARP. Again, I love the acronym, the grant application review process. In many cases and many of the funding cycles that CNCS oversees, the GARP will include external reviewers, as well as multiple CNCS staff reviews. Depending on the great review cycle, the GARP can take several months. I would say for our competitive cycle, it is about a three month long process, and it's something that typically occurs, obviously, starting in late January through the next several months.

Once the applications come in, the grants are reviewed and all the different reviews occur. CNCS will issue the NGA or the Notice of Grant Awards. Those are issues in eGrants since, for anyone who's on those session today with us, if you are brand spanking new or relatively new to your commission, just want to make sure you know about the Notice of Grant Awards and that you can find them in eGrants for each of the grants that your commission manages.

Over the course, once the grant awards are made, and the grantees begin their activities, you guys know that with you, CNCS conducts monitoring and recording activities. Those are absolutely key steps in the grant making cycle. Then the final once the grant funds are extended, the activities are concluded, recorded on, the final step in a federal grant making cycle would be closeout and audit. The closeout process for CNCS is managed by our office of grants management which Beth just showed you on the organizational chart. Then the audit process is managed by the Office of Inspector General.

I was dropping some terminology there a little bit under the grant making cycle talking about the competitive grant cycle. So, I just want to back up a little bit with the terminology and be more explicit about what we mean by the competitive cycle, the formula cycle and the special grant cycle. In the competitive cycle, this is the annual grant cycle that CNCS runs, the competitive cycle is the beginning of the annual appropriations and award making process through CNCS. This is where the NOFO comes from. All commissions, national programs and multi state programs and tribes have the ability to apply through the competitive grant cycle

The formal cycle in this setting is specific to state commissions. There are, as you guys know, there are funds designated each year to the federal appropriations process that are designated for state grants. The formula grant process that CNCS manages is only done with state commissions. Some state commissions will in their states run both types of competitions at different times of the year. They'll solicit sub-applications for competitive, sometimes they'll then have a different process to solicit sub-applications for formula grants, and there are commission's that combine those. So, for you at your commission obviously, it's important to know where you fall, where your state falls in this particular grant cycle. But for CNCS' purposes, it's good for you to know that these are two separate and distinct processes for us, two separate and distinct timelines.

Finally, there's a third category of grant cycles called the special category. This can mean a number of different types of grants. I think for commissions, it's important to call out the grants that we have designated specifically for commissions. So, the commission's support grants, the commission investment funds, and then the volunteer generation funds. More broadly, and in addition to the commission specific special grants, we also, CNCS will issue a notice of funding opportunities, or NOFO for special competitions around targeted priorities. We may have certain types of program development grants that are priorities in a particular year, and so there'll be a special grant cycle to manage that.

Again, from a commission's perspective, I think knowing that where you fall in the competitive formula timeline, I think is super important. And also, obviously for commissions, there are specific grant applications, specific deadlines, reporting et cetera, sort of the whole cycle related to the special grants that a commission may apply for and receive.

So far we've reviewed, as I said, some general information about how CNCS and AmeriCorps grant making works. Again, I know we're doing this quickly and you would linger over this more with your own staff. Let me turn our attention now from some of the mechanics of how the AmeriCorps money works and how the structure of the organization works, and talk a little bit about some of the critical pieces of the relationship, the human connections that exist between commissions and CNCS. I'm going to talk a little bit about expectations that CNCS has for the commission ED specifically. They can just apply broadly to all commission staff. Some of the communications that I think are important, the role, really the importance and the vital role that the CNCS Program Officer plays. Then we'll talk a little bit about some organizational or agency culture issues that are good to know when working closely with CNCS.

These topics as broad as they are, I think we're going to spend some time with them, because they really impact everything we do together, CNCS and all of our commission partners to promote and lead national service. We think they're vital for new commission staff to know early on, and we encourage, if you don't do this already at your commission, we encourage you to talk about these elements in some fashion as you orient your new commission staff in their first month.

I'm just going to say a couple words about our expectations, really the way that CNCS defines the role of the commission ED. This person is incredibly central to the work that we do. I would say from CNCS perspective, we really think that the ED is the keeper of all wisdom related to the commission and we expect that that person for instance Amber in Washington as you heard a few minutes ago, But the ED really has the overarching and bird's eye view of all the different functions of the commission. All the CNCS related functions as well as other activities that the state and the commissioner are involved in.

In terms of the commission ED specifically, we expect that the director will promote service of course as best said, be a relentless champion for service. But ED will really be the driving force or really help ensure that all the projects that are funded with AmeriCorps dollars that those are successful and that they get implemented accordingly. We of course, look to the ED to be the overseer of the compliance program within the stat. Then in many states, the commission ED is actually our primary contact. The ED will be the person that the program officer goes to, or works with closely. The ED will be the person that other CNCS staff will go to, and will work with closely

Then, some of the broad categories and specific duties, again, some commission directors will personally be involved in all of these activities. Some commission directors will not personally be involved in many of them at all. They'll have staff that take on these functions, take on these tasks. But overall, we hope that the director and we expect the directors to have a really hard and close handle on the financial management of the commission, how the money works, how it's being spent, and then the reporting on it. We, of course, expect that the ED is overseeing all of the personnel, the commission staff as well as the commissioners and the commission boards. We look to the ED to really lead, as Amber noted, the visioning and the strategy for your state. We really ... again that whole notion that commissions are the experts in your state. We think the directors are the visionaries for moving forward. And then, of course, we look to the ED to be the final word or the key contact around some of the business of what we do in terms of oversight, monitoring, et cetera.

So, I just have, the next several slides, we just had sketched out in one of our E-courses, what a year might look like for commission ED ... well, the tasks, not that a single human would do all these things. So, I'm just going to show you guys, I think the visual may not be large enough, and I definitely don't want to read all of this to you. But I just want to note a couple of things. I think what we wanted to do in this example, is really demonstrate the confluence of activities and responsibilities that occur for state commissions. The confluence between current year responsibilities for subgrantee management, commission management's, state level management and then last year's activities evaluating, reporting on activities from last year, and then gearing up for next year.

Commission's always live in this at a minimum of three year existence where they're straddling the past, the present and the year ahead. Depending on how your state budget process works, you may be living in an even longer term planning cycle. We just wanted to show this, and again, acknowledge that not all directors are going to be doing all of these things, the staffing will really vary from commission to commission. But I think what is important is really to articulate the different categories of work and responsibility for the directors and then again that notion of the confluence of the activities overlapping as the year moves on.

The final example I have for you is just a quick glimpse. Beth had mentioned and I mentioned earlier about the communications with CNCS, different staff in our relationships, how we engage each other, the example that you see in front of you now reflects three things that that are pretty constant. The timing may vary, but we feel pretty confident that commission staff and certainly directors well be invited to participate in these things. So, on the first or second Tuesdays of the month, we have optional update calls for our commission colleagues as well as our programs and tribes. This month can you can see the date that the call occurred. As Beth had mentioned we hope and we expect that each commission will have a monthly call with your program officer here at CNCS, depending on your schedule. The date and the time will vary and will be tailored to your needs.

And then just like we're having our presentation today on new commission staff orientations, each month we tend to have a webinar that may be useful to you or to your staff or to your subgrantees.

Those were the quick pieces I wanted to walk through related to some of the commission staff tasks and the responsibilities. Now, Beth is going to take it away and focus in on the PO role.

Beth Binkley: Thank you, Barbara. So as we have mentioned, I think several times already that the AmeriCorps State National Program Officer is the primary contact at CNCS. We'll probably mention that a few more times before we end the webinar. I just want to go over some of the key elements of our jobs as POs. We maintain a portfolio of grantees. The portfolios include direct programs and commissions, we provide grant process support, including NOFO development, grant reviews and clarifications. We also serve on state and national committee's such as Monitoring Committee or the Training and Technical Assistance Committee. We also have the opportunity to serve on cross unit committees, such as External Affairs Committees.

Each program officer has a group of AmeriCorps state national direct and commission grantees that we manage. In this capacity, we monitor the grantee performance. We look at progress on approved performance measures. We review and clarify the grantee progress reports or GPRs. We connect grantees with resources and opportunities to support their work. Finally, we help resolve and troubleshoot grantee issues such as completing grant amendments and eGrants.

Just to talk about communications. There are ongoing ways that commissions can communicate with program officers. Of course, you are welcome to pick up the phone anytime to reach out to your program officers with questions, any frequent email communications, in person meetings, site visits, events, service projects, annual meetings and trainings, and again through those regularly scheduled check in calls. That's also a good time.

The best way to maintain communication with your program officer is to verify your eGrants contacts each month, review and update the internal AmeriCorps distribution list as requested, sign up for alerts on the CNCS website, maintain the schedule of a monthly check in call, participate in recurring an episodic conference calls scheduled by CNCS, always again, copy your PO on email sent to other CNCS staff. And then whenever possible, engage your PO and program or commission events, service projects or trainings. To best help your PO become your champion and supporter, be sure that you are sharing all of your great news as soon as possible. Don't wait until the GPR, or even a check in call to share the news of a great accomplishment or meaningful service story. I always tell my grantees to let me know as soon as possible because as program officers, we like to share with our other program officers and within our unit and the larger agency, any good news coming from the field.Be sure to have a deep understanding of your commission work, especially the details that are not part of the CNCS required reports. That's always important to share with your program officer. Be sure to have an understanding of special circumstances that impact your ability to be successful. And to provide immediate heads up on any unexpected developments. For an example, a member grievance or a notice of investigation from the Office of Inspector General.

In addition to maintaining regular and positive communication with your program officer, there are other ways that you can engage CNCS in commission business or help to inform the agencies work. Each year, there are multiple opportunities for you to share, advise and volunteer. Commissions can be proactive about collecting and sharing powerful stories and images that depict the impact to national service as I mentioned. Making sure that you share those stories with your program officer on the CNCS website or through your social media avenues. This builds our ability to tell the national service story to potential AmeriCorps members and to Congress, the general public, and it keeps us all connected in our shared mission of service.

Each year, CNCS asks for input on core agency functions via the Federal Register, surveys, conference calls or in person meetings. It's really critical that grantees engage in this type of activity, especially since the results of the proposed grant guidance regulations or policies will directly impact your communities and the members served. You can sign up for the official mail distribution list on the CNCS website, and check with your program officer about all upcoming opportunities to provide the input to CNCS.

As far as volunteering there are opportunities to volunteer to help design or deliver aspects of CNCS or AmeriCorps state national work every year. You may receive invitations to help test new grant reports or training materials, speak on panels or webinars, or even coordinate service projects. Again, check with your program officer about all upcoming opportunities to volunteer and hopefully your schedule will permit to allow you to get involved in one or more of these opportunities.

In addition to the general guidance that we've just provided, commissions also play a key role in making the most of the PO relationship. That would include directly communicating your support needs or other feedback to your program officer, reminding your program officer, if you've asked for something and not received it in the requested timeframe, and also just tailoring the agendas of the monthly calls to best meet your needs.

With that, I am wrapped up on making the most of the PO relationship and the role of the program officer. So, I'm going to turn it back over to Barbara.

Barbara Reynolds: Great. Thank you, Beth. I just want to say a few words about the agency or the organizational culture at CNCS. I think as Beth and I both have talked about this coming from state commissions, and coming to work here at headquarters was a culture shock in many, many ways. I think we've had conversations with our colleagues around the country about working with CNCS and why we do some of the things that we do, why we do the things the way we do. I think that there are a few really good things to know as early as possible for new commission staff.

As you can see on the slide in front of you, I think obviously as a federal agency, there's quite a lot that's bound up for CNCS in federal budgeting, in the President's priorities, relationships with Congress and their funding oversight. There are laws and rules that cut across all federal agencies that we are bound by. There are times when there are new opportunities that come up as a result of our existence as a federal agency that that commissions can get in on and your states can get in on. Sometimes there are some challenges that come up from that.

I think that's always an important element of working with the CNCS, is just understanding our existence as a federal agency. The next thing that's really, really good to know is that we're not a single thing. We're not the Borg if you're a Star Trek fan. CNCS is made up of multiple units. Beth showed you that really simplified org chart a few minutes ago. That org chart represents about 500 people and all the different units and staff together form different 50 plus years of national service. Because CNCS was predated by a federal organization that oversaw VISTA and Senior Corps. So, we're really a combination of a lot of different things. I think that this is important for you to know for any number of reasons. But certainly not the least of which is that for commission staff you're going to be reached out to and connected and prodded by so many different staff at CNCS, and we all have different staffing structures. Aside from just the human personality differences, in many cases our departments are actually set up differently. The way that we communicate things in writing and verbally, there will be some significant differences. I think that that's incredibly important to know.

It was very jarring for me at my commission when I would interact with everyone who is sitting in DC and there's no consistency across them. I think it just takes awareness as well as some patience on dealing with the CNCS staff. The final pieces as you can see, with hundreds of employees and all the different work that we're all engaged in together, I think that's the CNCS is notorious for flooding your inbox. Back in the day, I used to get a lot of voicemail messages. I don't think that's it anymore. I think it's all about emails and voluminous communications is a nice way of saying. As a commission staff member, you get just a ton of communications through CNCS, and we don't always are necessarily coordinating these communications amongst ourselves. In one day you could receive as I did, when I was sitting at my commission, I could get 11 different emails from different employees asking me questions, asking me to respond or to take action. In some cases, those requests or those communications will overlap. The deadlines may overlap, there may be some real conflicts for you and your state or for you as a commission.

The thing we want you to know is just that that could happen again because of all of the moving parts that I just described. The thing we really want you to do as Beth mentioned earlier in the relationship PO, is just directly and quickly communicate that. The best thing I think for any commission to do is just to say, "Whoa whoa CNCS what is up? Why am I getting 11 emails from you today? I'm not going to be able to respond." And really try to work quickly and directly with the folks who are communicating with you. I think that that can go a long way.

None of none of the things I said are going to make it easy to manage the work and the agency culture at CNCS. We are what we are, but it's incredibly useful I think to remember the federal relationship and number of people and the differences between our units, as well as the communications that will hit you, or have hit you are ready.

So far today, Amber kicked us off, Beth and I reviewed a few types of basic and introductory information for new staff for those of you on the phone or those of you who work with new staff. We are going to turn our attention now as you can see to hearing about how new employees at the Massachusetts Commission get oriented. Beth is going to take it away for the intros.

Beth Binkley: All right, I'm super excited to introduce two staff members from the Massachusetts Service Alliance. First, Katie Koski. She joined MSA as a program officer in 2017. She has a background working in higher education and nonprofits, and she is also an AmeriCorps alum, yay. Prior to coming to MSA, Katie oversaw community engagement and nonprofit career programs at Wellesley College and administered internship and fellowship programs at Northeastern University and Harvard University. Katie received her Master's in Education from Harvard Graduate School of Education, and her undergraduate degree from Central Michigan University.

Next, I'm going to introduce Beth McGuinness. Beth is the Director of Programs. She's been in that role since 2007. However, she joined the Massachusetts Commission in 2001, and since has served in several capacities. She currently oversees the AmeriCorps portfolio, the Commonwealth Corps Program, and focuses on the development of new service based programs to address unmet needs in Massachusetts. Beth has a Bachelor's in history, and a Master's in Public Administration. Outside of her work, she enjoys spending time with her husband and her two boys.

So welcome both Katie and Beth. I'm going to turn it over to you now.

Beth McGuinness: Great, thanks Beth. We will spend a little bit of time chatting about how we're getting so oriented here to MSA and things that we have learned along the way. So, we will go ahead and jump right in to our slides. We will try to move things along fairly quickly. There's just a quick picture of our staff at one of our recent events. So, we can we can click along, if you don't mind. Thank you.

Just to set the stage a bit for what we're going to talk about and really looking at what our journey has been to really clarifying how we think about orienting new staff. We in the last year went through a significant period of staff transition. We really were in a spot where we needed to really clarify and put together a really solid, consistent plan across the board for onboarding new staff. It was a frequent topic of conversation on my monthly calls with Beth, in fact. And regularly giving updates, but it's now the end of May. In the last six months, our commission has 14 staff, and in the last six months, we oriented seven new staff. So a significant turnover.

We were able to welcome those new staff in. With the other pieces that are unique in our situation is that we had a number of very long standing staff. We kind of have sort of a big split between our staff who had been here previously, really having a lot of longevity and then welcoming on a number of new staff within a very short time period. So, we really needed to clarify what we were doing.

Really thinking about being aware of the demands on people's time knowing that you're orienting so many new people at one time, and knowing how much time that takes to really do it. We really felt like we had to be thoughtful and aware of both, supervisor's time, members of that particular team, their time commitments, other things happening at the same time. We really had to be thoughtful about that. So, we made sure that it was the best use of everyone's time and allowed people to get up to speed quickly. We also really were trying to be thoughtful about finding a balance between completely over scheduling people and overwhelming new people, but not wanting them to also feel like they didn't have enough work to do, or enough information to do what they needed to do. We were really trying to strike a balance.

The other thing that I would just say that when Katie and I were just putting our heads together before today's webinar, really, I think also, one thing that I think is important for us to know, particularly on hiring for the program officer roles is we really highly prioritize folks who have a connection to AmeriCorps, to national service. Whether it's through personal experience, having served, but ideally personal experience, having been a Program Director and managing members. That really allows them to get on board more quickly, but also have a different kind of credibility with their portfolio. But also somebody who does ideally know the landscape of Massachusetts in the nonprofit sector here. Some of the things that Amber was sharing earlier, folks have more of that background around our state and our needs.

Just to give you a little bit of sense of how we think about things. We can click along. We really thought about our process in three different buckets, and really thinking about navigating MSA and really getting to know our organization, our programs, all of that. Really thinking about orientation to the particular role. In this case, we'll talk more about the program officer's role, but we oriented new fiscal staff and that sort of thing. Obviously, those key pieces would be different depending on what their role is. And then we'll also spend a little bit of time talking about tools and resources.

Just quickly, I'm going to talk about the MSA orientation piece, and then I'm going to pass it off to Katie to get into some of the other pieces around team building and HR administrative pieces.

Really to start, one of the things that we did was basically take the orientation that we would do for board members, which is kind of a very high level across our different areas. Really give people a sense of our different programs, our different portfolios, what we're doing around training, what we're doing around external relations and outreach, what we're doing in terms of our budget, and how those different pieces fit together. We basically took that board orientation and repurposed it a bit more to really help see that overall piece and giving a snapshot of the organization across the board for new staff. We also make sure, and you'll see later in our presentation, a schedule that we set up for people in the first couple of weeks. One of the big things of that includes is one on one with staff members or if it's a big team, the team as a whole, and really giving people an opportunity to both learn about someone's role within the organization and how those two roles will interface, but also just an opportunity to get to know people.

Then also, when a new staff member joins whenever our next board meeting or our meeting with our commission is happening, that new staff member will join into our board meetings. That way they have an opportunity just to introduce themselves to a board and get a little bit of a sense of what happens at our board meetings.

That's a little bit around how we orient for MSA. I'm going to pass it off to Katie for some of these other pieces.

Katie Koski: We also wanted to try and be very intentional about building relationships among our staff members. Whenever a new staff person was starting, we tried to have a welcome breakfast or a welcome lunch. So, when that person first arrive on their first day, having a chance in a little bit more of a casual setting to go around and meet everybody at once. Then we were fortunate that in the midst of this hiring that we did, that an annual staff service day, that is usually affiliated with the holiday season, we ended up having in January. So, majority of our staff had been hired by then. So, it was a great opportunity for us to really focus on the values of our organization in that being of service, and again a more informal way for everyone to interact.

We tried throughout the hiring process, have lunches where we would take our new staff members out and again, have a more casual setting for them to be able to get to know one another. In under the human resources and administrative piece of onboarding somebody, the next slide we'll talk more in detail about that, but some of the things that we also did in trying to really be efficient around the different HR and admin pieces was sending out a summary of our benefits to folks ahead of time. It was actually something that we started doing during the interview process because of course, people always ask questions about how many days off, do you have any kind of retirement plan, and what are your medical and dental benefits? This way, that's a part of the process.

Also, in thinking about the first day, again, to try and make the onboarding more efficient, we would send an email ahead of time asking folks to bring all the documents or information they would need to fill out some of the HR forms, telling them something as simple as what is the door code for our front door? And just some other details to make sure that they were able to hit the ground running on their first day. Then, something as simple as making sure that their space was ready as far as their voicemail all set up, and their email setup and their desk. I shared the story several times about where in another role that I started, I didn't have an email account for about a week or two, and so I was using my own personal Gmail account. So, it's nice to have all that ready to go.

If you can move to the next slide. This is ... and sorry, there's a lot of content on this. But after I think about three or four of us had started, we were going along sharing, "Oh, have you done your retirement plan sign up yet?" "Oh, no, I hadn't done that. Can you send me the number that you have to call to do that?" We decided to sit down and talk through what are the different pieces of information that would be helpful. So, we came up with this checklist that we now use for the rest of the staff that came on after us. You can see the groups that we have.

So, it was everything from what are those forms that you have to fill out in the first couple of days to get all the different HR and payment systems ready to go, to making sure that the name tags and business cards get ordered. Also, over viewing some of our tech system, making sure that folks had access to everyone else calendar. That we got people's photo and bio up on our website. And kind of one of the big ones is walking folks through our electronic shared folders because they are quite comprehensive. We're also fortunate to be able to work from home after a certain amount of time. So, just making sure that folks had access to remote desktop, email, voicemail. Then some of the other things such as knowing where our laptops are, that you can check out how we can order more office supplies. So, this is a comprehensive checklist that new employees now go through on their first day or two.

Beth McGuinness: Just to add one piece to what Katie was just sharing, one probably additional piece of context that I should have mentioned is the Mass Service Alliance is a private nonprofit. Some of you that may be sitting here listening to this and may be part of state government, you may be able to rely on your state Department of Human Resources or just in a bigger organization, kind of an HR department. We are a private standalone nonprofit, so, there's just a lot of pieces that having that sort of checklist, all in one place just brought everything together. Because otherwise, things were just a little bit disjointed, because we really didn't have that HR department. We're all in our AmeriCorps team or Commonwealth Corps team or the training side of things, but we're not big enough to have an HR department.

So, it was really just an effort to bring things together and coordinate and make sure that everybody got all of the same information at the right time to make sure that people had a smoother onboarding process.

Katie Koski: We can move to the next slide please. The next piece that we're going to talk about is role orientation. Next slide please. I was the first of two new program officers that was hired and took point on helping onboard the second program officer, because we also had a third program officer who was on maternity leave. Until I was hired, it was a one woman show on our AmeriCorps team. This was something that I was able to take off of my supervisor's plate.

But in thinking about bringing on the second new program officer, I was able to sit with Beth and our other colleague who their senior program officer and really hear from them and also give my feedback on what are the big areas of information. A lot which has already been covered during this presentation. But under the training module, those are the bigger areas of information where once we identified them, we made sure to be intentional about blocking off pretty much an entire half day to go over that information and then assigning a staff person to cover that particular information.

Then we also thought about how well we're getting trained on these bigger training modules. There was also some information that was more time sensitive for new program officers to know, just in the continuous supportive programs. So, it's something that we are fortunate to do is we have quarterly meetings with all of our program directors. We had those happening about a month and a half after I had started and then another one about a month and a half later. We had to make sure that we were continuing to think about the content we were delivering there and just making sure that we were keeping up with any questions or needs that they had, because we were also going into January, which of course is a very important time for the competitive application process.

Then also thinking a lot about what information we needed about different aspects of program evaluation. We're fortunate to have a consultant that helps with a lot of those aspects for us. So, really having a chance to get some face time with her to learn about that, tapping into information on the Knowledge Network, on CNCS's website to get more into the detail of logic models and performance measures and really making sure we're well versed in to that, especially in reviewing applications before the competitive application deadline.

Next slide, please. For tools and resources, we also thought about different ways that we could bring in or reach out to continue building out the information that we wanted to provide for new staff. As you can see here, internally, in addition to the one on one that we mentioned with staff members from other teams or departments, we also made sure to schedule regular check ins with individual supervisors or have team meetings. Whereas before, they might have been kind of more on a on a need to know basis or a necessary basis. We tried to in the first few months of a person starting on our staff, make sure that those were more consistent so that we were always able to address questions in a more timely manner.

That's not to say that new staff members weren't able to go to someone's door and ask them a question, but also knowing that they have a meeting every Friday morning where they could do a download of questions. We also thought about what resources we share with new program directors. So, we have a handbook and do a pretty thorough orientation for them. So, that was information that was helpful to review to help us understand their role in our portfolio, a little bit more in addition to the calendar that we share with our program directors.

Externally, and you'll see in the schedule that we're going to share in the next slide, we tapped into a lot of the online trainings that are offered through Litmus and were frequently referring to different training modules on the CNCS Knowledge Network. Several of us listen to different webinars that are offered through ASC and then would also be looking at information on the base camp. Is something that was stressed to us from our very first day and something that myself and our other new program officer did within the first couple of months is we were able to make time on our calendars to go out and visit all the programs in our portfolio, in an informal site visit just to really have a better understanding of what their day to day looks like, have a chance to talk with some of their members, see where their office was. That was incredibly helpful in thinking about how we support our program.

If you look to the next slide. The writing is small, but we also shared an electronic copy of this if you want to look at it more thoroughly, but this is the orientation schedule that we put together for the first two weeks of the second program officer that we hired. If you can read this small print, you can see, as we mentioned, trying to find that balance between making sure that they were not feeling like they were sitting around doing nothing, but also not overwhelming them when they already probably felt like they were drinking the information from a fire hose.

We tried to schedule one or two significant blocks of training or conversation with them, both in the morning and in the afternoon. You might also notice that as an example, on the first Friday before this person met with our Director of Training and Technical Assistance, the new program officer watched and listened to the module to ask on that same topic. The same thing with going over our portfolio or the grants process that we tried to scaffold some of their learning around that piece

Next slide.

Beth McGuinness: I think just in terms of additional thoughts or things that that we've been thinking about and obviously somebody is not oriented in their first month or two. I think really trying to be thoughtful around what kind of opportunities can we continue to provide and think about, so that people continue to learn. Thinking throughout the year, really breaking out what does somebody need to know in their first week, their first month like Beth was mentioning earlier. But what do they need to know before they review progress reports for the first time? What do they need to know about conducting a site visit before they go out on their site visit, and really just trying to time those so that it's right before they need to use that information so that people are really taking it in and using it right away so that it becomes more ingrained.

Really thinking about providing that information and training in time. Before all of their progress reports came in, I sat down with Katie and our other new program officer and we went through how to review progress reports. When to send things back, when to ask the question, and just make an update, how to note those things in our system. Really making sure that that happens. Really thinking about ongoing CNCS and ask calls and webinars, and really encouraging folks to participate in that, both as a way to build their knowledge, but also as a way to, to continue to learn more about the network and who's in it.

And really thinking about conferences. Whether it's regional conferences, whether it's the symposium, but really making sure that we prioritize and, find a way to make sure that people have an opportunity to get to those things and participate. Again, both for content but also for networking. We feel like that's really important.

Katie Koski: To add to that, again, having the great resource of having some veteran staff members is they're very familiar with a lot of people who might be presenting at those conferences. So, before some of those regional conferences, we were able to share the agenda and who was presenting different workshops and sit down with those folks who have been attending some of these events for several years. And they were able to say, "Okay, go to this one because you'll get great knowledge on this, and oh, there's two great things happening at the same time. So, maybe one of you go to one and the other, go to another and compare notes." That was also very helpful.

Then just in thinking about continuous improvement, we acknowledge that, this is, although, it was a unique snapshot in MSA's history that we had such a large number of staff starting we definitely recognize that there are ways that we could improve the process. One of the new hires that we were able to make in a new role was our controller. She and our other fiscal manager are looking into the process of moving some of the onboarding, onto an online system. So, folks might actually ahead of time be able to fill out some of the different payroll paperwork and get enrolled in their benefits before they even start

We also had a chance to circle back to some of our new employees and get some feedback on their orientation and training process. Something that they mentioned that we listed here, the mini projects. As an example, we have a state specific service program that we oversee. They happen to have a grants review process that took place in late January early February, that we were able to review application for. Which was very helpful for some of our new staff who we're going to be doing that in their role, to be able to have that opportunity to go through that exercise before actually having to do it for their own program. So, really thinking about what are some of the, as we mentioned, kind of the smaller projects or work that you could have outlined for a person that they could pick up and focus on for an hour or two if they have a little bit of time in their first few weeks before they're really inundated with all the other aspects and responsibilities of their job.

Also making sure that you do have a list of resources for them to look at during those time. Again, thinking about the Knowledge Network and at base camp, and that was a lot of the follow up that we had to the different training modules was, I've just sat and talked to you through this for a couple of hours. But I think I would also recommend that you review these things in these places. In every single one of those modules training module was followed up with an email with links to all those different resources that we could review if we had some time. I think the other thing to add to this is that we are thinking about what are some of the other processes and systems that we need to document. Again, we've got some staff members who have a lot of great knowledge and we want to be able to capture that in a way that it's there and accessible to other new staff members. That's something that we're talking about and looking at doing over the next few months or a years or so.

Beth Binkley: Great. Thank you so much, Katie and Beth, we really appreciate you sharing your knowledge and experience with us today. One thing I just wanted to mention and throw it back to the role of the program and the constant communication that we talked about, that this example of Massachusetts having the challenge of the need to hire seven staff in a short time is a really good example of keeping your program officer up to date. It was something that we had several conversations about over the months that all of this was happening. It's just really good to keep your program officer up to date on things like this that are happening.

With that, I'm going to move on to the next slide, which is the resources. Just be sure to bookmark these links. They will connect you to a bunch of information that we've discussed here today.

Barbara Reynolds: Great, thank you so much, Beth. Thank you, Katie and Beth, that was wonderful to hear all of the details that you guys shared. We are going to move to our wrap up for today in the interest of time. I do want to save the chat box is still open. So, if there are folks that have had been wanting to ask a question for any of the presenters, please feel free to type those questions in. We'll hold them, we'll have those questions in the system and be able to follow up with you afterwards today.

As I said, we do have an evaluation on today's presentation. I know we've covered quite a lot of material. I hope, as we said at the beginning, that for those of you who are new and listening in today, that some of what we presented was new and different and helpful to you. For those of you who may be on and who are responsible for orienting new staff as it sounds like Beth was in Massachusetts and Amber is in Washington now, hopefully some of this material will be very useful for you as well moving forward. Please provide us feedback on today's webinar. The link for the form is in the web link. You'll also receive a prompt following today's presentation, just asking you to give some quick feedback. I think there's like eight questions on the survey.

As I said, the recording for today will be posted on the Knowledge Network in just a couple weeks. We'll be having a variation on this presentation for program staff on June 14th, so you guys will see an announcement about that. This could be something that's useful for any of your sub grantees or folks that you work with just FYI.

Finally, I just again want to say thank you to everyone who joined in today as well as my colleague here at the CNCS Beth Binkley, Amber in Washington, and Beth and Katie in Massachusetts. Thank you guys so much for all of your wisdom, all of your encouragement. We certainly wish you all the best in your commissions and we are here as resources for you. So, thank you very much. Have a good afternoon, and a great holiday weekend. Take it easy.