Resources for New AmeriCorps Direct Grantees
FY 2016

Corporation for NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

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Part 1: Introduction

Congratulations on being awarded an AmeriCorps State and National grant. Starting a new AmeriCorps program requires a significant amount of time and effort and a thorough understanding of program requirements and regulations that guide AmeriCorps.

This document is intended to help you with the program start-up process by highlighting requirements and where to find them and helping you become familiar with the AmeriCorps Grant Provisions, Regulations, and your Notice of Grant Award. This document is intended for informational purposes only. If you have any questions regarding your grant, please consult the primary sources referenced in the document, such as: the AmeriCorps Regulations, Provisions, and other terms of your grant award.

Overview of AmeriCorps State and National

AmeriCorps State and National programs recruit, train, and place AmeriCorps members to address unmet community needs.

Multi-state programs and Tribal programs (known collectively as "Direct Programs") are directly funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

Single-state programs are funded through State Service Commissions. According to §2550.2 (l), a State Service Commission is a bipartisan or nonpartisan State entity, approved by the CNCS, consisting of 15–25 members (appointed by the chief executive officer of the State), that is responsible for developing a comprehensive national service plan, assembling applications for funding and approved national service positions, and administering national and community service programs in the State.

Multi-state programs are awarded funds through AmeriCorps State and National Competitive grant opportunities. Single-state programs are awarded funds through AmeriCorps State and National Competitive or State Formula opportunities.

CNCS Staff Roles

There is a team of staff here at CNCS to support your program. The team includes a Director, a Deputy Director, Senior Program Officers, Senior Program and Project Specialists, Program Officers, Grants Officers, and Trust Officers. By now you have already been in communication with your program officer who will connect you with the other members of the team.

- **Director**: The Director is responsible for the strategy and overall direction of AmeriCorps State and National programs. The Director reports to the Chief Executive Officer of CNCS.

- **Deputy Director**: The Deputy Director oversees the strategic planning and implementation of all unit operations and develops policies.

- **Senior Program and Project Specialists** provide leadership and oversight for key unit functions, such as the grant application review process, monitoring and internal controls, performance measurement and data collection, and training and technical assistance.

- **Senior Program Officers** supervise program officers and provide guidance on policy and operations.

- **Program Officers (POs):** Your program officer is your primary point of contact with CNCS. He/she will support you in the implementation of your program, and assist in resolving issues that arise concerning your grant. Program officers review progress reports

and monitor programs for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. Program officers work closely with other units at CNCS to provide support to programs and will assist you in connecting to other personnel at the CNCS as necessary. As a new program, you are expected to be in regular contact with your program officer. You should set up regular check-in calls with your program officer during the start-up period.

- **Grants Officers:** Grants officers (also referred to as Grants Management Specialists) work in the Office of Grants Management (OGM) and are responsible for fiscal issues concerning your grant. Your program officer will provide you with the name and contact information for your grants officer. Grants officers review your Federal Financial Reports (FFRs) and monitor financial management systems for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. Please copy your program officer on correspondence sent to grants officers so that they are aware of ongoing discussions.

- **Trust Officers:** Trust officers work in the National Service Trust, which administers the Eli Segal Education Awards that AmeriCorps members receive. Your program officer will provide you with the name and contact information for your trust officer. Trust officers are the primary contacts for issues related to the Education Award, such as forbearance, education award, interest payments, etc. Please copy your program officer on correspondence sent to trust officers so that they are aware of ongoing discussions.

While we will do all that we can to maintain staffing continuity with your program, assignments will change during your time as a grantee due to changes in CNCS staffing or to evenly distribute workload among our staff, etc. Changes in CNCS contacts should not cause you disruptions since all staff are committed to providing you with quality, timely assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact us with your questions and concerns.

Designating Your Agency Contact
Once you have determined your internal communication structure for managing your grant, please provide your program officer with contact information for your primary and secondary points of contacts. He/she will include these contacts on our official email distribution list and in our program directory, which ensures that you receive important communication from CNCS. It is important to provide updates to your program officer of any staffing changes that may affect communications from CNCS.

Part 2: Grant Award Process

Soon after notification that your organization has been approved for a grant, your program officer will contact you to inform you of any steps you must take before the grant can be awarded and/or before members may begin service. Grant awards for new grantees are often conditioned to ensure the resolution of issues identified during the application review and/or to ensure that programs are ready to begin. If your award is conditioned, make note of the condition(s) and be sure to adhere to the resolution deadline.

Most likely, your CNCS program officer will request to review documents from you. These documents might include member position descriptions, member contracts, member timesheets, criminal history check procedures, and memoranda of agreement for use with your sites.

It is a good idea to keep your sites and other stakeholders informed of the start-up process timeframe, including the budget period start date and the member enrollment period start date. You will not be able to access grant funds until the grant award is issued <u>and</u> the budget period

has begun. Additionally, you may not enroll members until the member enrollment period has begun, which happens on or after the start of the budget period.

Member Enrollment Period
A program's member enrollment period is the time during which members funded from a given grant year's resources may begin service and is usually one year in length. These dates are provided in the Notice of Grant Award and in eGrants. New programs often incorrectly assume that members who are enrolled during that period must complete service by the end date of the member enrollment period; this is not the case. The length of time members have to complete service is determined by their term of service. In most cases, members have a maximum of one year to complete service[1]. Your program design should determine whether your program establishes a set member enrollment deadline within the member enrollment period or whether you allow enrollment to occur throughout the entire period (commonly referred to as "rolling enrollment").

Pre-grant Award Requirements
New CNCS grantees are required to complete the following: a Financial Management Survey (FMS), an online Federal financial management course, the forms mentioned in the next section of this document, and other forms as necessary. The Office of Grants Management will send you an email regarding the completion and submission of the related forms. Please be sure to return these forms as directed as soon as possible.

Payment Management System
Grantees access funds through a Payment Management System (PMS) or "Drawdown Account" from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Set-up requires that you complete two documents: a Direct Deposit Sign-up Form (SF-1199A) and a Recipient Contact Form.

All programs must complete a quarterly report (a Federal Financial Report, called the SF-425) on the funds that have been received through the HHS Payment Management System. This form is submitted online to HHS via the HHS Payment Management System. Reports are due on April 30, July 31, October 31, and January 31 during the time that your grant is active.

Pre-award Costs
The Office of Grants Management will consider requests in writing for permission to begin to accrue allowable costs that can be charged to the grant before the grant has been issued. These pre-award costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the grant award. Approval of the grant award remains contingent upon the resolution of all programmatic and budgetary issues.

Approval of pre-award costs does not authorize a grantee or subgrantee to have AmeriCorps members begin serving. AmeriCorps members may only begin service after a grant award has been issued and after the start of the member enrollment period. Members may not count any hours served prior to the award being issued as part of their term of service.

All pre-award costs are incurred at the organization's own risk. CNCS is under no obligation to reimburse for pre-award costs if the organization does not receive an award or if the award is less than anticipated and inadequate to cover such costs. Approval for pre-award costs is issued in writing from the Office of Grants Management.

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[1] A member's term of service may be extended if a member is suspended and the program completed and approved a change of status in My AmeriCorps.

Part 3: Support

AmeriCorps is a large national network. In addition to the CNCS staff team mentioned previously, many resources will be at your disposal to support you in the start-up and on-going implementation of your AmeriCorps program.

Below is a summary of these resources, with particular emphasis on the ones that you will utilize most in the start-up phase of your program.

Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) for New AmeriCorps Direct Programs

Our support plan for new programs is tailored to the unique needs of each program. The following are the options you and your program officer may select in designing your individual TTA plan for the first year of your program.

- **Topical Conference Calls**–A variety of calls are held throughout the year on topics of interest to AmeriCorps programs. The list of topics is developed based on our assessment of grantee needs and requests from grantees. Topics might include performance measurement, criminal history check procedures, or the My AmeriCorps Portal.

- **Online Resources**—The **National Service Knowledge Network**[2] is the national service hub where CNCS grantees, members, partners, staff, and volunteers can locate information and resources related to national service.

- **Conferences**
    - **The AmeriCorps State and National Grantee Symposium** offers opportunities to network with other national service programs, receive training on key topics, and get updates on CNCS policies. The Symposium is usually held in Washington DC in September. Please check with your program officer on this year's dates and location as well as the registration information.
    - **Regional Conferences** – AmeriCorps programs will have an opportunity to participate in regional conferences organized by and for CNCS grantees. Please check with your program officer on the time and location of the conference in your area.
    - **Affinity Groups –** Affinity groups are comprised of grantee organizations and state service commissions that share common experiences, challenges, or goals. They serve as a source of support for participants and can help them work towards and achieve common goals. These groups meet by phone according to a calendar determined by each group's participants. Some of the groups also meet in person at national service conferences or participate in peer-exchanges. Your program officer can describe the active affinity groups to help you decide whether you would like to join one or more of these groups.
    - **National Conference on Service and Volunteering** – The National Conference on Service and Volunteering is the largest annual gathering of volunteer leaders in the United States and a good opportunity to network with other AmeriCorps programs and volunteer and national service organizations. It is organized annually by Points of Light.

[2] See link in Part 7.

Part 4: Rules and Regulations

Please spend a significant amount of time during the start-up period becoming familiar with the rules and regulations of your AmeriCorps grant, as well as applicable state and federal requirements. This point cannot be over-emphasized. As a recipient of taxpayer-funded grants, you have the responsibility to know the rules and regulations that govern the use of these funds since improper use may result in reimbursement of all or some of the funds and other possible actions.

AmeriCorps-specific Rules:

In order to run an effective program, grantees must know the rules of AmeriCorps, which can be difficult to navigate even for organizations that have prior federal grant experience.

AmeriCorps requirements are found in our Statute, Regulations, and Provisions/Terms and Conditions.

- **The Statute** that authorizes federal funding for the AmeriCorps program is the National and Community Service Act of 1990. This Act has been amended several times since its original passage in 1990, including by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, and most recently by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009.

- **The Regulations** are CNCS's interpretations of the Statute and set out the agency's purpose and powers, and the circumstances of applying the Statute. Regulations are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The AmeriCorps regulations can be found in Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 25, and beginning with section 2520.10. Citations for Regulations are written like this: 45 C.F.R. §2522.230 or abbreviated as §2522.230.

- **AmeriCorps Terms and Conditions** are additional grant requirements. New Terms and Conditions are issued each year, and citations are written like this: [AC I. B.2].

- **Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)** for which your grant was awarded contains important information. You will find it a helpful reference at many times.

- **AmeriCorps Policies and Policy FAQs** clarify policies relevant to AmeriCorps grants.

The Regulations and Terms and Conditions are your primary sources of information on the day-to-day management of your grant, and your program officer will assist you in becoming familiar with them.

The items mentioned above are accessible on the "Managing AmeriCorps Grants" page of the AmeriCorps website: http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/managing-americorps-grants.

Other Requirements

- **State Laws***:* AmeriCorps programs must become aware of the laws of all of the states in which their members serve. For example, you should find out about the state laws pertaining to taxes, workers compensation, background checks, etc. If you need assistance accessing this information, State Service Commissions can be a helpful resource. Contact information for the commissions can be found at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-service-commissions/

- **OMB Circulars***:* OMB Circulars are issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and outline administrative requirements and cost principles for nonprofit organizations, state and local governments, and educational institutions using federal funds. Understanding the applicable OMB Circulars is critical to operating a compliant federal grant. Please see http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/index.html. Fixed-price grants, including Education Award Programs (EAPs), are not required to follow cost-principle requirements in the OMB Circulars.

Part 5: Program Start-up Considerations

As you read the Regulations and Provisions you will see that there are many systems that you will need to develop in order to manage a program that is in compliance with the requirements. This section will highlight some of the systems or aspects of program management you should develop during the start-up period. These are: financial management, written policies and procedures, site management, training and technical assistance, member management, performance measurement and data collection, and CNCS electronic data management systems (eGrants/MyAmeriCorps Portal). These are certainly not the only aspects of program management you will need to consider and develop during start-up. Please discuss others with your CNCS program officer.

Financial Management Systems

Under CNCS regulations, grantees must maintain financial management systems that provide accurate, complete, and current disclosure of AmeriCorps grant finances. [3]

Components of a financial management system include:

- Adequate practices that address regulatory requirements
- Written policies and procedures
- Documentation of expenses
- Cash management systems
- An efficient accounting system
- Budget controls
- Time and activity documentation
- Documentation of matching requirements and in-kind contributions
- Timely, complete, and accurate reporting
- Internal controls

The following are several important financial management facts for new grantees:

- Each AmeriCorps grant must be tracked separately from other grants and programs.
- Staff identified on the AmeriCorps grant budget – whether paid with CNCS funds or match (called "Grantee Share" in the eGrants budget), must maintain timesheets that document the actual amount of time spent on the AmeriCorps grant and on other activities.[4]
- If a subgrantee is found to be out of compliance with grant requirements, CNCS will hold the grantee liable.

Please note that there are companies that offer training on federal grants management. Such courses would be especially helpful for grantee organizations that have no or minimal experience with federal grants management. While these trainings do not focus on the specifics of managing finances for an AmeriCorps program, they provide general guidance on federal

[3]Financial reporting requirements are reduced for EAPs and other fixed price grants.

[4] Staff timesheet requirements follow the OMB Circular Guidance and do not apply for EAPs or other fixed-price grantees.

requirements and setting up sound accounting practices. It is the grantee's responsibility to ensure that adequate financial systems and well-trained staff are in place to manage the AmeriCorps resources.

Policies and Procedures

During the start-up period, you should develop and document policies and procedures that lay the framework for how your program will be managed. A well-written and comprehensive set of policies and procedures will help your program run more efficiently and effectively, while also ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements. Some policies are mandated by grant requirements, but you will want to create other policies as well that are tailored to your program and your organization.

Required Policies: Before you enroll members, you should create policies compliant with AmeriCorps requirements. Refer to the Regulations and Provisions for guidance on developing your policies.[5] Ask your CNCS program officer for assistance.

Your program policies and program monitoring must ensure compliance with grant requirements, including, but not limited to:

- Non-discrimination
- Prohibited Activities[6]
- Reasonable Accommodation
- Drug-free Workplace
- Grievance procedures
- National Service Criminal History Check
- AmeriCorps member safety safeguards
- Site selection criteria and process
- Recordkeeping
- Member eligibility documentation
- Member information confidentiality

Program-specific Policies: Programs also should develop vacation and sick leave policies for members; policies for member selection, evaluation, and termination; standards of member conduct, attendance requirements, and dress codes; requirements of sites for progress reporting, raising and documenting match and promoting AmeriCorps identity; communication hierarchies, etc.

The above-mentioned policies that you develop will serve as the basis for your site and member agreements, which will be discussed later in this document. These policies should be included in any program manual or handbook that you distribute to sites and members. Throughout the life of your program, it is a good idea to continue to develop and refine policies and procedures that guide your program implementation.

Program Manual: You are strongly encouraged to create a manual of your program's policies and procedures for easy access by anyone affiliated with your program. Your CNCS program officer can provide you with suggestions for the content of your manual, as well as samples from existing AmeriCorps programs.

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[5] Citations for requirements for the above-mentioned policies can be found at http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants

[6] See 45 C.F.R. §2522.65 and *Member Supervision and Support* in the Provisions.

Site Management
Effective site management is a critical component of a successful program. Key elements include maintaining regular contact with your sites, communicating expectations, providing training and technical assistance, holding them accountable through monitoring and oversight, and developing a strong site network in which all sites are committed to achieving shared program goals. During the program start-up period, please dedicate ample time to putting these site management systems in place.

Site Agreements: Site agreements (also called a contract or memorandum of understanding) outline the terms of each site's participation in your AmeriCorps program. There should be written agreements with your operating sites as well as with any member service sites that are part of your program. While you are required to ensure that your sites are aware of all applicable grant requirements, the content of these agreements is not prescribed by the CNCS. Many organizations find it useful for their agreements to include expectations, outline responsibilities, and explain the consequences of non-compliance. Agreements often include how many members will be serving under the contract, organizational match requirements, member position descriptions, program-specific policies, and references to the AmeriCorps Regulations and Provisions. Agreements can clarify which program and fiscal management tasks will be handled by the grantee and which will be handled by the subgrantee or operating sites. You might also include deadlines for member enrollment, reporting requirements, and any other program administration needs.

Training and Technical Assistance
It is the responsibility of grantee organizations to provide orientation, training, and technical assistance to anyone associated with the program, including parent organization staff and operating site staff, on the tasks that are required of them.

Many programs find it helpful to spend part of the start-up period developing a staff training plan that consists of one-on-one technical assistance, check-in calls, group conference calls, cross-site mentoring, training calls, and/or site visits, etc. Your CNCS program officer and other program directors are good resources for information on the topics that might be useful to include in your training plan.

Member Management
As national service participants, AmeriCorps members will have different needs and expectations than your organization's employees, interns, or volunteers. Consequently, during the start-up period you will need to prepare systems and tools to manage your members. Member management includes the development of member service agreements, member position descriptions, a recruitment plan, strategies for retention, quality member training, etc. The start-up period is also the time that you should develop forms that you will use to implement your member document management system, work out the details of your member living allowance distribution process, and choose a health care provider for your members. Be sure to consult the grant requirements and talk with your program officer about member files, living allowance distribution, and choosing a health care provider because there are several requirements related to these aspects of the program.

Member Service Agreements: Before starting service, each member must sign a member service agreement. The agreement is an important tool to ensure that your members understand what is expected of them and must be signed before the member begins their service. Please review the supervision and support section of the Provisions for member service agreement requirements.

Member Recruitment, Eligibility, and Selection: Many programs think of recruitment as a year-long process and are always promoting the program to help them find next year's members. There are many steps a program can take during the start-up period to prepare for recruitment. These include:

- Gaining an understanding of member eligibility requirements[7], the CNCS non-discrimination policy[8], considerations for faith-based and community organizations for member selection[9], and prohibitions against volunteer and employee duplication or displacement[10]. In addition to age and educational attainment requirements, only U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents are eligible to serve in AmeriCorps. Please note that the citizenship/lawful permanent resident requirement for service is a stricter standard than eligibility to work in the U.S., thus ***use of the standard I-9 form to check for member eligibility is not sufficient.*** Please review AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.200 and FAQs about the Citizenship Verification Process, which are available via http://www.nationalservice.gov/official-forms/identity-and-citizenship-verification-process-faqs

- Determining whether your program will recruit nationally and/or locally for members and clarifying who will be responsible for recruiting members. Some programs handle all recruitment out of the grantee organization whereas others handle all recruitment at the site level. Many programs share the responsibility with their sites.

- Developing position descriptions for members[11] which must clearly describe the service tasks and responsibilities assigned to the members. Keep your performance measure targets in mind as you create positions descriptions so that all of your members are contributing towards the stated outcomes of your project. Keep position descriptions in mind during recruitment so that you can match the right individuals with the right position. Make sure that your position descriptions do not include or put the AmeriCorps member in a situation in which the member is at risk for engaging in any prohibited activity, activity that would violate the non-duplication and non-displacement requirements, or prohibited fundraising activity. Activities must also be within the scope of the awarded grant application. Position descriptions must accurately and completely describe the activities to be performed by each member.

- You might consider developing a member screening tool to help you assess each applicant's level of commitment, experience, skills, and ability to serve as a member for the required period of time. Recruiting members that are a good match for your program, along with providing quality member support and training, is the best way to achieve high retention rates.

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[7] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.200

[8] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2540.210 and the AmeriCorps Provision Attachment "The Civil Rights and Non-Harassment Policy"

[9] Review CNCS' FAQs for Faith-Based and Community Organizations, available at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/Faith_FAQs.pdf

[10] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2540.100

[11] Allowable activities are those that correspond to the program's outlined objectives and are compliant with AmeriCorps Regulations § 2520.25, § 2520.40- 2520.45, § 2520.50, §2520.65, §2540.100, and Section IV of the AmeriCorps Provisions.

- Gaining an understanding of the CNCS national service criminal history check requirements and developing policies and procedures, using the resources and documents provided by CNCS, to comply with the requirements.[12]

All programs should post a description of their program on the web-based My AmeriCorps Recruitment and Placement System.[13] This is a great resource for spreading the word about your program. You may begin using the MyAmeriCorps recruitment tools for posting positions and accepting applications as soon as your grant has been awarded.

To assist you in meeting your recruitment goals, please visit the recruitment training and technical assistance website "EnCorps," available at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/member-and-volunteer-development/encorps/encorps-resources-support-member-recruitment-and

Member Orientation and Training: Once members have begun their service terms, programs prepare them for service through orientation and training. The grant requirements[14] specify certain topics that must be covered during orientation. Be sure to cover the Prohibited Activities in sufficient depth during orientation. Also document that you covered these topics and that your members were in attendance.

In addition to the required topics, you should consider including the following topics:

- Introduction to national service and AmeriCorps
- Orientation to the community to be served
- Program rules, regulations, and expectations
- Review of the member agreement
- Overview of applicable member benefits (living allowance, health insurance, child care, etc.) and information about benefits through the National Service Trust (education award, forbearance, interest payments)
- Training on service activities
- Member evaluation
- Site-specific information (schedule, dress code, professionalism, workspace logistics, the local community, etc.)

National Service Trust: As defined by §2525.10, the National Service Trust is an account in the Treasury of the United States from which the CNCS makes payments of Eli Segal Education Awards, pays interest that accrues on qualified student loans for AmeriCorps participants during terms of service in approved national service positions, and makes other payments authorized by Congress.

After successfully completing a term of service, AmeriCorps members who are enrolled in the National Service Trust are eligible to receive an education award. Members use their education award to pay education costs at qualified institutions of higher education, for educational training, or to repay qualified student loans. The education award for each program year is tied to the value of the Pell Grant. The amount of the Pell Grant upon which AmeriCorps education awards will be based may change each year, thus, the amount of an AmeriCorps education award may also change annually. To determine the amount of an AmeriCorps education award, CNCS will use the amount of the Pell Grant as of October 1 (the first day of the federal fiscal

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[12] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.205, § 2522.206, and § 2522.207 and § 2540.200 - § 2540.207, and see helpful information available ***Managing AmeriCorps Grants*** page referenced in Part 7.
[13] A tutorial is available at http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/americorps/myamericorps-portal-training-egrants.
[14] AC FAQ C.2 and Sec. 2522.100.g.2

year) in the fiscal year in which the national service position is approved. Please check the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the education award amount for the current grant year. It is extremely important for programs to indicate the amount of the education award that members will receive for successful completion for a term of service in the members' agreements and reinforce this topic during member orientation. Members can access the award in full and in part, and they may take up to seven years after the term of service has ended to claim the award.

Information about the award amount, eligibility, limitations, a list of colleges and universities that match the education award, forbearance, interest repayment, tax implications, and other important information, including frequently asked questions can be accessed at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/segal-americorps-education-award

The online My AmeriCorps Portal allows members to request Education Award payments and other benefits, such as Forbearance on student loans and Interest Accrual payments. In addition to other functions, this automated system lets members view the status of requests for education award payments, provides up to date information on education award balances, and allows users to update contact information, view and print tax statements and forms, and access customized letters certifying a term of service with an AmeriCorps program. Members can access My AmeriCorps directly via https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do. Note: program staff usage and access to My AmeriCorps will be covered in a later section in this guide.

During program start-up, programs should become familiar with the rules and regulations related to the National Service Trust.

Performance Measurement and Data Collection

Demonstrating the impact of your program through performance measurement is very important to your success as a grantee. You will report your progress to CNCS twice a year, but you should collect data from your sites throughout the year and aggregate these results to ensure that you are on track. You should spend time during the start-up period developing data collection tools that will allow you to demonstrate the impact of your program. Please visit the CNCS Performance Measurement pages listed in Part 7 of this document to access helpful resources on performance measurement. Let your program officer know if you have questions about performance measurement and data collection.

CNCS Electronic Data Management Systems (eGrants and MyAmeriCorps)

The eGrants system: As an AmeriCorps grantee you will use the web-based system, eGrants, for:

- Grant applications
- Grant amendments
- Financial and program reporting
- Member recruitment and management

You can access eGrants at www.nationalservice.gov or bookmark this page on your computer: https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp

Each user at a grantee or applicant organization should have a unique login account. Your eGrants account information should not be shared with other members of your staff. The grantee administrator, which is an individual with the eGrants grantee administrator user role, has the responsibility of determining who at the organization has access to the system.

If you need assistance with eGrants, you can access the Help Desk at https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask_eg. Please notify your CNCS program officer of any outstanding eGrants issues that are not being promptly resolved by the Help Desk.

MyAmeriCorps: MyAmeriCorps is the part of eGrants that includes member recruitment and management functionality. It is also the same system that members use to access their education award and other National Service Trust benefits. Program staff users access MyAmeriCorps via the "Portal Home" link available after logging into eGrants. Please see the previous *National Service Trust* section (starting on page 12) for guidance on how members access MyAmeriCorps.

Please note that there are two different interfaces for this part of eGrants, and they are called different names for different users. For AmeriCorps grantees (commissions and programs), the interface is called the Member Portal, and it is accessed from the eGrants home screen after the grantees sign on at https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp. For AmeriCorps members and alumni, the system is called MyAmeriCorps, and it is accessed at https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do.

During program start-up, programs should:

- Spend time reviewing the many important resources, including tutorials that are available on the National Service Knowledge Network to help you learn how to use MyAmeriCorps. Please see http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/americorps/myamericorps-portal-training-egrants.
- Choose whether they want site staff to enter member enrollments and exits into MyAmeriCorps or whether the parent organization will take responsibility for these functions. It is a good idea to discuss the pros and cons with your program officer.
- Determine who will have access to MyAmeriCorps at the site and/or parent organization, decide which role(s) and access level each user should be assigned, and then go through the process of having each user create an account. Grantee administrators will have to approve the creation of each account.
- Develop protocols to ensure that you will be able to meet the requirements to enroll members into MyAmeriCorps within 30 days of the start of service and exit them within 30 days of the last day of service.

Part 6: Next Steps – Program Implementation

Once you have enrolled members, you have entered the program implementation stage. Now you can begin using the systems and tools you developed during the program start-up period. The sub-sections that follow provide some tips to help you move forward.

Ongoing Member Training, Support, and Retention

Throughout the service year programs should continue to implement a training plan for members and ensure that members are getting adequate supervision and support from their sites. A program that has developed a comprehensive training and support plan is likely to achieve good member retention. Providing regular in-service trainings on relevant topics, offering teambuilding and connection to a peer support network, rewarding members throughout their terms, ensuring that members are getting quality supervision, offering frequent opportunities to reflect on service and instill an ethic of service, and providing "Life After AmeriCorps" training are core components of an AmeriCorps training and member support plan. Performance evaluations are not only required, but they are an important part of a member development plan when combined with providing feedback to your members.

Monitoring

As stewards of public funding, programs need to ensure that their subgrantees and service locations are aware of their contractual requirements and are in compliance with all of the rules, regulations, and provisions governing AmeriCorps funds and programs.

Providing sufficient oversight of operating sites and host sites is also in the best interest of programs because CNCS holds the grantee responsible for infractions at the subgrantee or service location level.

To achieve quality oversight, program staff must create adequate systems, tools, and protocols for monitoring sites that are fully implemented and available in writing. An adequate monitoring strategy features an array of oversight activities with grantees/sites, including:

- document review
- compliance reviews
- program quality and performance reviews
- special audits or surveys
- one-on-one technical assistance to resolve any issues
- special efforts to ensure that prohibited activities are not violated

You will receive a copy of the AmeriCorps Monitoring Tool from your CNCS program officer at the start of your grant year. Many programs find it helpful to model their own monitoring tool on ours. Be prepared to review your monitoring strategy with your program officer.

Grantees are monitored by CNCS utilizing standard protocols. These may include program or financial monitoring visits, desk review, and training and technical assistance visits. CNCS staff also monitor your grant performance by reviewing your progress and financial reports. In addition, CNCS's Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducts and supervises independent and objective audits, evaluations, and investigations of CNCS's programs and operations. The OIG is available to offer assistance to AmeriCorps grantees that become aware of suspected criminal activity in connection with the AmeriCorps program. Grantees should immediately contact the OIG when they first suspect that a criminal violation has occurred. The OIG may be reached by email at hotline@cncsig.gov or by telephone at (800) 452-8210.

Reporting

Programmatic Reporting: All AmeriCorps National grantees must submit two progress reports per year. These reports are called Grantee Progress Reports (GPRs), and they are submitted in eGrants. See the Reporting Requirements section of the AmeriCorps Provisions for information. We will provide guidance on how to complete your report prior to its due date. Your program officer will review your progress reports and provide feedback.

Financial Reporting: Reporting requirements vary by grant type and are outlined in the AmeriCorps Provisions. For assistance with Federal Financial Reports, please contact your CNCS grants officer.

Grantees must set their own submission deadlines for their subgrantee financial and programmatic reports that will enable you to provide timely and accurate information to CNCS. We suggest including reporting deadlines on your organizational calendar.

State Service Commission Collaboration

Collaboration with State Service Commissions is an important and required part of managing a multi-state AmeriCorps program. As mentioned earlier, a State Service Commission is a

bipartisan or nonpartisan State entity, approved by the CNCS, consisting of 15–25 members (appointed by the chief executive officer of the State), that is responsible for developing a comprehensive national service plan, assembling applications for funding and approved national service positions, and administering national and community service programs in the State.[15]

The CNCS expects all non-Tribal[16] multi-state AmeriCorps programs to collaborate at the local level. Programs are expected to communicate and coordinate with state commissions in the states where they operate, as described in more detail below. The list of state commissions can be found here: http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-service-commissions/

Specifically, programs are required to:

- Prior to submitting an AmeriCorps grant application to CNCS, consult with the State Service Commission of each state in which the organization plans to operate.
- After a grant has been approved, provide commissions with an update of your plans and with the contact information for your local program(s).
- Ensure your local program(s) is on the commission's mailing list.
- Ensure your local program keeps the commission informed of its activities.
- Participate in the State Service Commission's development of their state service plan as well as appropriate training and other events.

Not only can commissions provide valuable information about state laws and give you access to local AmeriCorps contacts for improved collaboration in addressing unmet needs in the state, they can also offer you program development assistance and provide your members with networking opportunities. Additionally, many commissions host statewide Days of Service, ceremonies for program launch or end-of-service, and inter-corps councils for member networking and input. These opportunities can provide your members with important connections to foster a better understanding of AmeriCorps beyond your program and can assist with member development, training, and morale.

Days of Service and Other Initiatives

Each year CNCS encourages AmeriCorps programs to participate in CNCS initiatives such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance, and AmeriCorps Week. These initiatives present programs with a special opportunity to address unmet community needs, collaborate with other AmeriCorps programs, build corps member morale and teamwork, promote volunteerism and service in local communities, and highlight the difference AmeriCorps members make across the nation. Please refer to the http://www.nationalservice.gov website for more information on these initiative and resources that could help you with getting involved in the Days of Service.

Grant Continuation – Application Required

You must submit an application each year in order to continue to receive funding. Your application for the second year of your program will be due early the following year. While continuation applications are not as time-consuming as the process of writing a new application, it is important to allot sufficient time to develop a strong proposal and complete all of the required elements with excellence. The Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity and Application Instructions for future grant competitions will be posted on our website at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities.

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[15] §2550.2 (l),

[16] Tribal programs are not required to collaborate with State Service Commissions, but collaboration is encouraged for mutual benefit.

Part 7: Recommended Key Resources for Program Start-up and Management

- Review and bookmark the ***Managing AmeriCorps Grants*** page: http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/managing-americorps-grants. It includes links to the AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including the most recent provisions, frequently asked questions, and criminal history checks requirements and resources.

- Visit the ***National Service Knowledge Network*** at http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources: The Knowledge Network is the place you can access how-to guides, information on best practices related to many aspects of managing an AmeriCorps program, take online tutorials to sharpen your skills, and much more.
    - The following pages are especially helpful:
        - **Resources for AmeriCorps Programs** provides additional resources that may help with program start-up, including new program checklist which includes important elements that a new program should consider in the first few months after the award: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/americorps/resources-americorps-programs
        - **National Service Criminal History Checks** provides detailed information and resources on the AmeriCorps criminal history checks requirements: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/criminal-history-check
        - **CNCS Performance Measurement** page includes information and training materials relevant to measuring and reporting the impact of your AmeriCorps program: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/performance-measurement/americorps
        - **Online Courses** page lists several courses that are relevant to AmeriCorps program management, including: AmeriCorps program management, disability inclusion, financial management, education awards, and volunteer leveraging. The courses can be accessed at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/online-courses
        - **AmeriCorps 101: AmeriCorps State and National Member Online Orientation** can be used in your member training: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/member-and-volunteer-development/americorps-101-americorps-state-and-national-member

- To find out about upcoming ***trainings*** for AmeriCorps State and National grantees, please visit: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/americorps/americorps-state-and-national-training-calendar

- To help you promote your work as an AmeriCorps program, please refer to the ***Marketing and Media Resources*** developed for grantees: http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/outreach

Closing

We hope that this document helps you develop an infrastructure to support a strong, effective AmeriCorps program.

If you have suggestions to improve this document for the benefit of other new programs, we would love your feedback. Please share feedback, challenges, and lessons learned with your CNCS program officer so that we can better assist you and other grantees during the start-up process.

We are excited that you are joining our network of AmeriCorps programs. We wish you much success during your first year with AmeriCorps and beyond!