

AmeriCorps Member Training & Orientation



Webinar Session Highlights (August 9, 2018)

Developed as part of the 2018 AmeriCorps Staff Development Series, this webinar focused on the topic of AmeriCorps member orientation and training. The session provided an overview of member orientation and training components – both of which are CNCS requirements – and delved into a discussion about best practices deployed by Citizen Schools and GRID Alternatives, two AmeriCorps national programs. The overall objective of the webinar was to equip grantees with sufficient tools to create and implement membership development plans for their own programs.

Speakers:

Beth Binkley, AmeriCorps State and National Program Officer, CNCS

Brandi Jimenez, Director of National Service, Citizen Schools

Virgil Looney, SolarCorps-AmeriCorps Program Manager, GRID Alternatives

Adam Maurer, CEO, Positively Partners

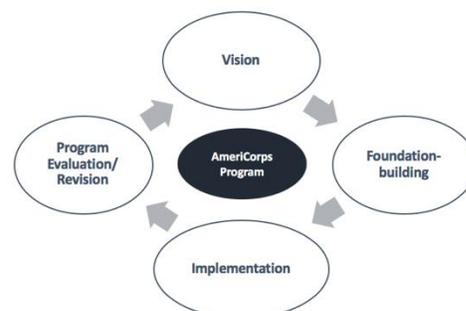
Tova Pertman, AmeriCorps State and National Program Officer, CNCS

Overview

Member development is a critical element of running a successful AmeriCorps program. A strong development plan includes orientation and training and is integral in driving member service by ensuring that members are fully prepared to carry out programmatic activities.

Cycle of Program Development

AmeriCorps program management is represented by the Cycle of AmeriCorps Program Development (see image at right), a general program model or outline for how an AmeriCorps programs may create the appropriate structure to help members be successful. Design and delivery of programs vary by organization as each entity ensures that programs sufficiently meet the needs of their communities. The program development cycle is an ongoing process, and member management paths occur throughout it.



There are three periods during the Cycle that closely relate to member training:

- 1) **Vision:** In this first phase, programs must articulate how member service will positively impact the community needs or problems that the program is addressing (e.g. through member service activities).
- 2) **Foundation Building:** During this phase, programs must provide details on the exact tasks and nature of the member service in the required member service agreement and position description. These two critical program management tools show members exactly how they will be successful and make a difference in their communities.
- 3) **Implementation:** During this phase, programs must equip their members with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful (e.g. through member orientation and service training).

CNCS Requirements & Expectations for Member Development

The 2018 AmeriCorps Grant Terms and Conditions (pages 8-9) require member training on three topics: orientation, prohibited activities, and limits associated with the number of allowable hours (e.g. the 20% cap on hours an AmeriCorps member may spend in education and training activities). The goal of orientation and training is to equip AmeriCorps members with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully complete their terms of service. Guidance on member orientation and training – including minimum requirements – may be found in the NOFO/NOFA, grant terms and conditions, policy FAQs, and 45 CFR.

All members must participate in three areas of development to both prepare for and continue engagement in service:

- 1) **Orientation:** This introduction to AmeriCorps member service is the first step in cultivating a positive working relationship with AmeriCorps members. A thorough orientation can help reduce members' anxiety about their new service role and establish positive expectations for performance and communication. Orientation helps define why a member should be serving in a particular program and in AmeriCorps, outlines the structure of the program and how members will be serving, and demonstrates how members will fit into the program and AmeriCorps. Examples of orientation topics include: the history of national service, prohibited activities of members and the volunteers that members recruit and/or manage, the member service agreement, the position description, the grievance procedure, reasonable accommodations, and nondiscrimination information.
- 2) **Service Training:** Service-specific training to the program and the interventions that the members will be implementing is critical as the training program ties together the program needs, member needs, skills, and knowledge necessary for members to succeed. Training prepares members to understand the population to be served, learn the curriculum or the intervention to be implemented, and know the expectations and responsibilities of their service. The training program must include specific guidance and skills training to prepare members for their assigned duties if those skills are not required before the members start their program. The timing, topics, methods and training staff of AmeriCorps training programs will vary across the network.
- 3) **Ongoing Training and Professional Development:** As the program moves through the service year, additional training opportunities are a way to allow members to strengthen the knowledge and skills they've already gained in specific service areas, learning new skills, earning certifications or licenses (where appropriate and relevant), and gaining an understanding of how to translate their service experience into future employment opportunities.

Case Studies: Citizen Schools and GRID Alternatives

Staff from Citizen Schools and GRID Alternatives, two national AmeriCorps programs, shared their experiences associated with member orientation and year-round training.

Citizen Schools, a national program that operates in three different regions (CA, NY, MA), recently transitioned from a national, centralized to a localized, decentralized training approach and shared insight into the benefits and challenges associated with this shift. As a result of their transition to a regionalized model, benefits ranged from cost-efficiency gained during in-person trainings to enhanced training relevancy and effectiveness. Because of their new approach, regions are now able to customize trainings based on what the campuses, members, and communities need at a localized level – thus resulting in deeper connections for members with their campuses, communities, and regions. Citizen Schools also identified challenges resulting from the transition – namely around knowledge and adherence to AmeriCorps compliance, connection building to the national AmeriCorps community, and continuity and excellence of programming. The organization has focused on implementing solutions to these issues via empowering local stewards (regional leaders), distributing curated content to be standardized across the network, holding regular check-ins with regional leaders, and establishing regional and national accountability partners.

GRID Alternatives, an Oakland, California-based nonprofit solar company, hosts a week-long orientation that is centered around having clear purposes and outcomes for both the week as well as individual sessions. The topic of prohibited activities is one of the central focuses at the training, and the organization reinforces learnings via incorporation of a peer-to-peer learning methodology. GRID shared two training activities that have proven particularly effective for and popular amongst members. The first, “Mapping Your Year,” helps members identify the goals that they are working towards during their year of service and break said goals into actionable steps that are spaced out over the course of 12 months. The “Commitment Activity” offers participants the opportunity to identify their commitments for their year of service, share these with peers, and connect with fellow participants around commitments and shared engagement in service.

Resources

- [Managing AmeriCorps Grants webpage](#)
- [GRID Alternatives](#)
- [Citizen Schools](#)