

AmeriCorps Member Orientation and Training



Text Transcript

Barbara Reynolds: ... today's presentation. Again, my name is Barbara Reynolds and I'm the project specialist for AmeriCorps State and National. I'm going to kick us off today with some logistical information as well as some framing comments. Then we'll jump into our topic at hand, which is of course the member training and orientation. Before we jump into content, I do want to just make a couple of technology announcements, just to make sure that everything is functioning the way that we're hoping that it will today.

First of all, on the screen in front of you, you should be seeing a few different things. Right? You should see in the middle at the bottom of your page a little pod that's called Web Links. In that Web Links, you have active links to the PowerPoint presentation, the slides that you're going to be looking at today as well as the evaluation form for this session. I'm going to draw your attention to these. You should be able to access these throughout the presentation. Really invite you and encourage you to submit an evaluation. It's a very short form that we would love to hear your thoughts on how today's presentation went.

First, check just to make sure that you can see the Web Links. You do see on the screen, and I just want to let you know verbally, that we are recording today's presentation. So if that is not comfortable for you, please disconnect. We will post the audio recording as well as the visuals on the Knowledge Network later on this month. Just wanted to just show you that and show you the link of where you will be able to find the recording. Then finally, you should see on the lower left or the left-hand side of your screen the chat box. It's a chat that will allow you to say words to everyone who's on or to select particular participants. We will use the chat box during the presentation a couple different times.

We're also going to have this chat box open for our staff monitoring behind the scenes just to keep an eye out if you have questions or comments as we move throughout the entire presentation. If you could please ... Let's go ahead and test this chat feature. I want to make sure that you're seeing it and that you're able to access it before we jump into our content. If you could please just type a quick "howdy", "how's it going," "what's up from Idaho," wherever, just to let us know. I see a bunch of folks typing in there. A couple of hellos, his. An hola. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Yep, that's incredibly helpful. Keep that coming. This is the webinar equivalent of going around the room and introducing ourselves. I'd love to see a greeting from everyone who's logged in right now. It looks to me like at a quick glance you are hearing my voice and you're able to use your chat feature, which is terrific. That is what we definitely wanted to confirm. All right. Thank you. Yes. "Ahoy." I like an "ahoy." That's a summer greeting. All right. Thank you.

Just to give a little context for today's session before we jump into our particular topic, today's presentation is one in a series of webinars that our state and national unit provide over the course of the year, of this particular year. In general, what we're hoping to do with each of these webinars is to focus on a core piece of management or core piece of our AmeriCorps business and really help build skills and knowledge with this focus and with this training. We also hope frankly that this time that we have together with you today will give you a chance just to take a break, take a step back from the busyness of your program day-to-day or your commission day-to-day.

I definitely know coming from both the commission and the program world that early August for many of us around the network is a crazy, crazy busy time. Again, I want to thank you for taking time to join today and also hope, as I said, that this time together will give you a bit of a break from the crush of your work. As I said, today's presentation is one in the series that we are providing over the course of 2018. You can see on the slide in front of you several other topics. I know just from glancing at the participants list that some of you have logged on for earlier presentations, so nice to see you again. Nice to see you virtually.

The rest of this year, we do have several other topics that we'll be addressing as well. So hopefully your schedules will allow you to join us. In late September, we're going to look at some grantee progress reporting. Later in the fall, we'll look at data quality monitoring. Then our next session this month is going to focus on member and site monitoring and reporting. That is what we're doing for 2018. Then just to frame again for some context for the presentation, for each of our webinars, we expect that we will have a combined, a unified audience of our state service commission partners as well as our colleagues in national AmeriCorps programs. Tribal program staff will often log in for these as well.

We anticipate that those of us ... those on the line with us today will represent a diverse array of experiences, right? Some of you may have been at your commissioner at your program for many years. Some of you may be brand spanking new, and that's wonderful. It's wonderful to have all of us together. It is definitely our intention and I think our tone when we're looking at our webinar series that we're starting with the basics. We're really expecting we do have a good number of participants on this session as well as other webinars. Folks who are new to this world and are really starting to get their AmeriCorps legs.

A lot of our content will be very introductory. Then we do have some guest speakers later on to share some of the more advanced elements related to member orientation and training. That's what we're doing today. That is a sense of the audience and the purpose for today's presentation. It is now my pleasure to turn it over to our presenters. They will take it away.

Tova Pertman: Thank you, Barbara. Welcome, everybody. We're going to start off just briefly going through today's agenda for the webinar. What we're going to do is we're going to kick it off with some introductions, both from our end and your end ... Virtually. Then we're going to move into some content and talk about AmeriCorps member orientation and training and CNCS requirements. Then we'll move on to member orientation and training at Citizen Schools and GRID Alternatives. We'll have our guests from the field, from two national programs, Citizen Schools and GRID Alternatives, who were willing to really share their experience in this area with all of us today. So we very much look forward to that.

Then following our guest speakers from the field, then we'll open it up for Q&A. We will ask everyone to hold their questions. Make note of them. We will open the lines for Q&A following our guest speakers unless you would like to ask a question via the chat box. Please feel free to do that at any time. We'll be monitoring that throughout the webinar. Then we'll move into wrap up and closing remarks.

Beth Binkley: Hi, everybody. This is Beth Binkley. I am a state and national program officer. The person you were just listening to was Tova Pertman. She is also a state and national program officer. She joined CNCS in September of 2012. Before coming to CNCS, she worked for international nonprofit development organizations for almost 10 years, managing international exchange and youth development programming. Tova is also a return Peace Corps volunteer. She spent two years in the Republic of Moldova. I'm going to turn it back over to Tova.

Tova Pertman: Thank you. The individual you were just listening to is Beth Binkley. Beth is also a state and national program officer. She joined CNCS in March of 2013. She also works with a diverse portfolio of commissions and program grantees and contributes to a variety of projects here at CNCS. Beth has also, prior to coming to CNCS, served as State AmeriCorps Director for the South Carolina Commission for National Community Service as well as Service Director for City of Columbia.

Now that we've introduced ourselves, we'd like to take a few minutes to find out who is on today's session. In the chat box, please enter your name, agency, location, relationship with AmeriCorps and your favorite summer vacation spot that we're all closing our eyes and dreaming about right now. Here's Beth's example. Beth, CNCS, Washington DC, AmeriCorps staff member. She wishes she was in Edisto Island. Where is Edisto Island, Beth?

Beth Binkley: It's actually Edisto Island. It is in the great state of South Carolina.

Tova Pertman: Nice. All right. Let's see who's with us today. In the conversation box, please go ahead and enter your name, agency, location, AmeriCorps relationship and favorite summer vacation spot. Oh, we've got representation from Alaska. Serve Alaska. Marti, hello. Oh, and Alaska is her favorite vacation spot. What do you know? Wonderful. Kathy Gattinger. We've got Arkansas Commission represented. Wonderful. We have Emmy C., Math and Reading Corps from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Welcome, welcome. We have Kentucky Ready Corps Program. Wonderful. Thank you. "When I vacation, I'm making art at home at my drawing board." Beautiful.

Barbara Reynolds: I can't believe no one said Baltimore. I'm from Baltimore. Why is Baltimore not a favorite vacation spot? Come on, people.

Tova Pertman: This is great. We've got a number of participants here. Thank you for sharing and putting in your information. We have representation from Michigan, the Michigan Community Service Commission, American Youthworks, Conservation Corps. Welcome. "Come on, Baltimore," from Barbara Reynolds. We've got SVP in the house. Wonderful. Welcome. She wishes she were in Hawaii. Excellent. Milwaukee Christian Center, Youth Build AmeriCorps. Welcome. Thank you so much, everyone.

Okay. Now we're going to jump in to the session. Thank you again for joining us today. Member development is a critical aspect of running a successful AmeriCorps program. A strong development plan, which includes orientation and training, is a key component in driving member service by ensuring the members are fully prepared to carry out the

program's activities. Today we're going to discuss the various components of successful member development, so that you have the tools you need to create and implement a solid plan for your own program.

Spotlight on Cycle of Program Development. You see this handy graph here that we're going to talk about. AmeriCorps program management is represented in this way. The cycle of AmeriCorps program development. The cycle is a general outline for how an AmeriCorps program may create the appropriate structure to help members be successful. This is a general program model. The way that it looks will vary tremendously around the country. For example, tribal programs will design and deliver programs that meet their own community's needs. Multi-state programs will look very different in different parts of the country. State programs will also be tailored to reflect the needs of their respective states and community members.

The program development cycle is an ongoing process and member management paths occur throughout it. This is also a good way to think about continuous program improvements as you continue to move through your program development cycle. We want to show you a few examples and talk about a few examples of three elements of the cycle that particularly relate to member training. First, we have the vision phase up at the top. In this first phase of AmeriCorps program development, programs need to articulate how member service will positively impact the community needs or problem the program is addressing.

This includes how programs will train members to address that need or problem through their service activities. Next is the foundation building step in the cycle. In this next phase of AmeriCorps program development, programs need to provide details on the exact tasks and nature of the member service in the required member service agreement and position description. Those two tools are critical, as you all know. The member service agreement and the position description. These two program management tools will show members exactly how they will be successful and make a difference in their communities.

Then we move to implementation. In this third phase of AmeriCorps program development, programs need to equip their members with the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful. This is done through member orientation and service training. Now we're going to take a look at CNCS requirements and expectations for member development. Beth is going to continue on with that.

Beth Binkley: Thanks, Tova. What are the member training requirements? CNCS language combines orientation and training, but for the purpose of today, we're going to separate them out as we discuss all of the aspects of member development. In the 2018 AmeriCorps grant terms and conditions, CNCS requires a member orientation, training on prohibited activities, and it also outlines a limit on the number of allowable hours, which translates to how many hours an AmeriCorps member in a program may spend in education and training activities. The answer to that is no more than 20% of the aggregate of all AmeriCorps member service hours in your program as reflected in the member enrollment and the national service trust may be spent in education and training activities.

Capacity building activities and direct service activities do not count towards the 20% cap on education and training activities. In addition, guidance on member orientation and training is infused throughout CNCS guidance for AmeriCorps grantees. This includes from the annual notice of funding opportunities to the regulation. All of this reflects our overall goal for member orientation and training, which is to equip AmeriCorps members with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully complete their terms of service.

Keep in mind that the CNCS rules, regulations, grant terms and conditions and the policy frequently asks questions or FAQs are where we lay out the minimum requirements. Commissions and programs always have the opportunity to provide additional trainings above and beyond the CNCS minimum requirements. If you need a refresher on where to find the requirements, we recommend that you visit the Managing AmeriCorps Grants webpage on thenationalservice.gov. Let's move on to the specifics of member development.

In preparing members for service, it's important to look at the three areas on the slide: orientation, service training, ongoing training and professional development. No matter the program design, all members need these three areas of development. Let's take a minute to explore each component. Orientation, or the introduction to AmeriCorps member service, prepares the participant for his or her relationship to what we like to call the AmeriWorld. Orientation 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 it can help establish positive expectations for performance and communication that will last throughout the service term.

Orientation forms a solid sense of how AmeriCorps programs will function and how the AmeriCorps member fits into AmeriWorld. Specifically, orientation helps to define why a member should be serving in a particular program and in AmeriCorps. It also helps define the structure of the program and how members see how she or he will be serving. It

also demonstrates how she will fit in to the program and into AmeriCorps in general.

Some examples of orientation topics are listed on the slide. The history of national service, which includes how national service has evolved over time and what it means today. Prohibited activities, which includes members and volunteers that members recruit and or manage. I'd like to repeat that. Prohibited activities training should include the prohibited activities of members and the volunteers that members recruit and or manage. The member service agreement should be reviewed also with members during orientation, so that they understand all aspects of the AmeriCorps program, expectations and benefits. The benefits would include living allowance, education award, healthcare or childcare. Other areas to review include the grievance procedure, reasonable accommodations and drug-free workplace and nondiscrimination information.

The position description of the member service should also be reviewed so that members understand the rules and expectations at the service site. Members will also need to understand that they are AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps identification is also an important aspect to discuss during orientation. Staff and community members, where members are serving, will need to know that these individuals are AmeriCorps members. Also, as a reminder that something that everyone has committed to as a part of their awarded grant is AmeriCorps identity and code branding.

Though it's important for members to understand that being a part of AmeriCorps includes wearing their logos every day, being able to create and deliver elevator speeches and that also the organization proudly displays the AmeriCorps logo on its website and in its offices. Lastly, time and attendance. It's important to train members to know when to complete their time sheets, who signs their time sheets and differentiating between their service training and fundraising.

Barbara Reynolds: Hey, Beth. We have a question in chat. Is it okay for me to...

Beth Binkley: Sure.

Barbara Reynolds: Okay. Yeah, there's a question just from Mary asking to state the limits on the number of training hours for members again more slowly. We didn't have that written on the slide.

Beth Binkley: Sure.

Barbara Reynolds: Is that okay?

Beth Binkley: Yeah. Let me just get that.

Barbara Reynolds: Hang on one second. We'll go back. I don't think there was anything on that slide about it.

Beth Binkley: Yeah. It's 20% of the aggregated AmeriCorps members. Total members in your organization. No more than 20% of the aggregate of all AmeriCorps member service hours in your program.

Barbara Reynolds: Great. Thank you. I didn't want that to be hanging out there.

Beth Binkley: Okay. Now that we've gone over what should be included in member orientation, I want to move on to member training and the introduction to service-specific skills and activities. A thorough orientation is absolutely necessary for all AmeriCorps members, no matter the program type or design. Also, service-specific training to the program and the interventions that the members will be implementing are also critical. As the training program puts together the program needs, the member needs, the skills and the knowledge necessary in order for the members to succeed are all important. Training prepares the member to understand the population to be served, to learn the curriculum or the intervention to be implemented and know the expectations and responsibilities of his or her service.

Another way of looking at the member training program design is by examining the connection between the duties the members will be required to perform and the qualifications that applicants will need to have in order to enroll in the program. 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.

No matter what the program design is or where the AmeriCorps members serve, AmeriCorps programs must ensure that the training program includes sufficient opportunities to build the skills necessary to provide the program's intervention. This is an area where we see programs struggle with, particularly those programs that are new and designing their training programs from scratch. Training on programs intervention is an absolutely critical point in setting members up to be successful.

Some examples of service training topics vary from program to program. Here's a list that we put together that could help you in trying to determine which training topics would fit your program. For instance, member safety. This could be regarding vulnerable populations or how to operate power tools or conducting home visits. Member wellness would be connecting to other members serving, managing stress or managing service expectations and data collection includes expectations of data collection, timelines, how to use the data collection tools and then service-specific trainings

on how to identify flora and fauna if it's an environmental program or how to manage a classroom in foreign education program or how to conduct an energy audit. This list of course is not exhaustive. Of course, programs need to include trainings that will prepare their members for successful service.

Another part of member training is on-going training and professional development or continued member 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 and possibly even earning certifications or licenses and also learning to translate their service experience into future employment opportunity.

Some examples of on-going training topics could include service-specific trainings, those that continue throughout the year as webinars, discussions or best practices. Professional development, which is specific to the service that the members are engaged in. These could be certifications or licenses, as I mentioned before. Opportunities for continued learning and on-going throughout the service year. An example would be inviting a guest speaker relative to the member's service or participating in a webinar and/or conference.

Life after AmeriCorps would include learning resume building, interviewing practices and also applying learned skills to future opportunities. Other ongoing opportunities could be refresher trainings on prohibited activities or other topics that are relative to the member service intervention. Now that we've gone through the different components of member development, we would like to hear from all of you out in the field on what does your member training look like? We'd like for you to take a few minutes to answer these questions in the chat box. What are your training topics? What activities do you include? Of course, we give examples of lectures, role plays, scavenger hunts, et cetera. And who leads the training program? And who provides the training?

Okay. So everyone, just to repeat, what we are asking for you to do is to throw out a couple of answers to the discussion questions that we provided on the slide, about the training topics you provide. Be sure to use the chat box. What activities do you include in your training program? And who is leading the training program or providing training?

Okay. So it looks like we're getting some interesting information over the chat box. We see an ambassador training. We are seeing that the program director, manager, and other guests who visit from the headquarters in Birmingham ... That must be the folks who do the trainings. Leading the trainings is a mix of national and regional staff. Online TED Talks, webinars, for members that are applicable, resume-building, networking. Do what you love, love what you do. We do some role playing, dot voting, webinars. Topics include history of AmeriCorps, tutoring practices, prohibited activities. We like that. What is national service, the nuts and bolts. Elevator speeches. Barb, you're including all the right pieces.

Classroom management, reading strategies. Engaging local professionals who donate their time for certificate-level training when available. That's wonderful. We did have a question that came up. I think that Joan had asked about who is responsible for training, and who was responsible for training members, and that really varies across programs, and it just depends on what the intervention is. Sometimes it is someone from the community who comes in to train the members. Sometimes it could be the AmeriCorps staff themselves, or the program staff themselves, or if they have a specific intervention that is an evidence-based program that someone from that particular organization would come in and train the members on how to implement that intervention.

Tova Pertman: Yeah, if I could just add ... If there will be some de-centralization to your training, you just want to ensure that through your regular oversight and monitoring of the sites, and sub-grantees that you're ensuring those trainings are taking place in one way or another, if they're out of your direct realm.

Right. So we're still getting a lot of really good information. We really appreciate you guys responding to this. I see that there's a training curriculum that includes history of AmeriCorps and YouthBuild, team building and leadership development. Someone who implements games and role plays of tours. So thank you all very much.

Okay, Joan, I see that you asked something about ... specific to a service site. So yes, if there is something service site-specific, then sure, the staff at that service site or the service site supervisor may be the one who leads that specific training. So good question, thank you.

So now we've got one more little interactive, fun piece here, and we are going to take a quick poll. So, the first poll is, do your members come together in person for training/orientation? Or is it, as Tova just referenced, decentralized and scattered across the country or across sites? And do you use webinars, conference calls, or other remote tools to implement your orientation and trainings? And votes are coming in!

Barbara Reynolds: Yeah, hopefully you can see the results on the screen. It should be visible to everyone.

Beth Binkley: 50-50. All right! So it looks like a little more than half of you do use webinars, conference calls, and other

remote tools, which is very exciting. And then those ... 82 percent, or a little bit higher, do come together for in-person trainings. So, great. Thank you so much. Now that we have reviewed everything that's required by CNCS, and provided you with some examples for orientation/training, we are now going to hear from some of your peers, and I'm going to turn that over to Tova.

Tova Pertman: Thank you for that. Yeah, we're super excited and really lucky to have two national programs represented ... representative of two national programs who are willing to share their experiences in this area with all of us. So the way this will work is that I will introduce representatives from each program, and then they're going to speak, and then we will hold questions until the end, unless you want to type something in the chat box, and please feel free to do that at any time.

So first, I'm really pleased to introduce Brandi Jimenez from Citizen Schools Incorporated. Brandi is the Director of National Service at Citizen Schools, and is known around the office as Captain AmeriCorps. Pretty cool. Brandi oversees all of Citizen Schools AmeriCorps grants, national, state, and Vista, and works closely with senior and regional leadership to ensure a best-in-class experience for the members. Brandi is a two-time AmeriCorps alumna. She served in both the American National Civilian Community Corps, otherwise known as NCCC, and as an AmeriCorps Vista with the Yakima County veterans' program in Washington state.

Along with Brandi from Citizen Schools, I'm also really pleased to introduce Adam Maurer, the CEO with Positively Partners. And Adam has a very interesting background as well. He started his career during the e-commerce boom in the late 90's, and basically led human resources and talent initiatives for multinational corporations for many years working in the United Kingdom and European Union. Upon his return to the US in 2009, he focused on human advanced HR recruitment, selection, and employment engagement practices for schools, nonprofits, and social enterprises. Adam also served as the head of talent for National Heritage Academies and is the Chief Talent Officer for Citizen Schools.

So I'd like to welcome Brandi and Adam, and turn it over to you. Thank you.

Adam Maurer: Wonderful. Hi everyone, this is Adam. I'm going to start off, and then Brandi's going to have the opportunity to share with you a lot about the practices we've been doing at Citizen Schools. Hopefully we can get up that first slide that basically talks about Citizen Schools' timeline, because we have been a long-term partner with AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps has been kind of a foundation partner of our organization since 2002. The organization founded in 1995 to promote and reform and specifically to think about how to provide extended learning time for middle school students and give them hands-on learning opportunities. So AmeriCorps members come in and work side-by-side with teachers to help them integrate members of the community into the classroom and help give middle school students both more time and time that's sort of hands-on in ways that accentuate their learning content.

Citizen Schools, like so many organizations within the ed reform space, has been on quite a journey. First, like TFA and other partners, getting a lot of national funding and national attention. Within the last few years, funding has been more local and our attention has turned more regional, and the organization has moved from seven regions to now serve three regions and to do those with more local focus. And that's required us to change the way that we train and develop our AmeriCorps members and induct them.

And so that's really what we're going to have the opportunity to talk to you a little bit about today, is kind of how we made that transition from a centralized approach, which was really exciting, because we had close to 300 members at one point come together in a big summer institute. Everyone said the pledge together, and it was incredibly inspiring, in terms of kind of bringing together the ideas of national service with the mission of the organization, but really a combination of finance and this need to focus locally and harness kind of the passion of some of the local leadership, has caused us to take a more regional approach.

And so Brandi, if you want to talk a little bit about what we found in terms of pros and cons as we've moved from this more national, centralized approach to a more regional one.

Brandi Jimenez: Yeah, thanks so much, Adam, and thanks everybody for having us and allowing us a couple of minutes to share. Some of the regional training benefits that we've found so far kind of have a central theme. If you read through these bullet points, it's really rooted in having our region be able to customize their training based on what the campuses are needing, what our members are needing at the regional level, and what our community is needing. And so we've been able to keep this in mind. We've been able to have and build deeper connections for our members with their campuses, with their communities, and with their regions.

As Adam mentioned, we are a national program but operate in these three different regions, and with most of us who deal with education, we know that each campus, let alone each region, has their own needs and their own kind of

culture, and so being able to regionalize training has really been able to increase the opportunity to make this training more relevant to what the community needs. And when I say community, it's really everybody, not just our offices in that region, but the campuses that we serve, the students that we serve, and the members that we serve in those regions.

And it's also been able to ensure that our members and our organization is fully integrated into those communities, and so it's really ... I mean, you've heard me say community in each one of these, and so that's what a regional training really allows us to do, and have the regions be able to have much more involvement in that customization. And one other things that's pretty obvious, it's been less expensive. I don't want to say it's been more cost-effective, but as it is now, year two of this regionalized training, without having to pay for lodging and meals and transportation to bring everybody to Boston, we are actually able to reallocate those funds and save on some of those expenses, so it has been, so far, a little less expensive.

So those are the benefits. But to chat a little bit about what some of the trainings that ... not the trainings, some of the challenges that we've seen. If I had to sum it up in a couple of words, it would be more internal communication. With everything being more decentralized, we as an organization have had to step up and really hone in those internal communications, especially around compliance, specifically around AmeriCorps compliance. I know Adam spoke earlier about how foundational and necessary our partnership with AmeriCorps is, and so we definitely want to maintain that continuity with messaging out compliance, like prohibited activities, gear expectations, and things like that.

And it's also been a challenge ... when you make something a little bit more regionalized, it's ... How do we build up that connection to our national organization, the national movement that is AmeriCorps? So, for example, when we were centralized, we had everybody come to Boston. We had 200, around 200, people in the room when they took their AmeriCorps pledge, versus now, when they're in their regional offices, about 50 people. So everybody knows the energy that comes with more AmeriCorps members and the more people in a room, and so it's really ... That's been a challenge, of us trying to navigate those waters, so they can still feel connected and fully understand their impact and their connection to this movement.

Another challenge is maintaining the continuity and the excellence of the program. Again, it's all based around internal communications. Everything with how ... in the central office, specifically with our AmeriCorps compliance, with our AmeriCorps expectation, it all came through one channel and messaged out in a singular voice, and our members went to our regions already having this knowledge. And so the difference is our regions are the ones that have to message that out, and so we have to be the ones that make sure ... making sure that they have the tools and the resources and the information that they are needing to be able to message out that information correctly, accurately, and efficiently.

Yeah, and I think we're going to hand it back over to Adam to talk about ... We talked about some of the solutions ... some of the challenges, but he's going to mention some of the solutions that we're currently working on and working through.

Adam Maurer: Yeah, so we've really tried to harness this regional energy, and even in our recruitment of AmeriCorps members, we've found that kind of really highlighting local impact and opportunity to think about the assets that exist in the local community are really strong draws for folks that want to do this work. And this is very differentiated from five or six years ago, when I was recruiting AmeriCorps teaching fellows for Citizen Schools, it was all about being a national change agent, and the fact that through your efforts, education was going to change as a whole. I think today, we're finding that the members that we're recruiting are very interested in changing the lives of the students that they intersect with kind of day-to-day, and kind of working to kind of marshal existing resources that are within the community.

And so that lends itself very well to this localized strategy, but it really does mean empowering local stewards, finding folks within each region that are not just thinking about delivering content, but are outspoken on things like AmeriCorps compliance, that's kind of just as relevant. I have lost our slide here. That ... Can that come back up?

Barbara Reynolds: Yeah. Hey, Adam, it's Barbara. I'm sorry, we're having a little Adobe Connect visual challenge. It should be back up in just a minute.

Adam Maurer: Okay. No worries. So finding those local stewards are really important, because those are the advocates that not just deliver the content, but continue to reinforce it on a day-to-day basis. We've also had to think really carefully about curating content. What is the content that needs to be standardized across the network? Things that we need everyone to hear and everyone to hear with the same sort of messaging. Those could be things like our uniform requirements and prohibited activities, the kind of supports that are available. But again, it's sort of ways to think about the service mindset and the growth mindset that is so integral into the program that we're seeking together.

And Brandi, without the slide up here, remind me of the third, if you don't mind?

Brandi Jimenez: Yeah. It's curate, regular check-in, and accountability partners.

Adam Maurer: Oh. And accountability partners is just about those ... that opportunity for check-in. So we've found that we've had to develop new practices around attendance and participation, kind of, how do we know that people are getting the content and how do we create monitoring and quality check? So it meant that we have to have more people come out to the field to check on this. So what's really interesting is, we didn't do this by design. It wasn't necessarily that we had this national approach and all of the sudden wanted to go regional.

I think that there were some things that led us in that direction, and we chose to take advantage of it, but it really was the need to save money not bringing everybody to Boston, which was a program that I think was going very, very well. The reason I think Brandi said it might not be cost-effective, even though it's cheaper, is that I think we have seen some deficit and some need to grow around instructional practice and larger connection to the mission. And so this year we're really looking to continue to learn from that and to find the balance between the regional and the national.

So Brandi, if you want to take us home with some of those key mindset and values that we're definitely focusing on with curated content.

Brandi Jimenez: Yeah, for sure. These are all in the slide deck, and I believe everybody has access to it, but while it's in upload progress ... some of the key things that are really found ... although we are operating and every region is putting on their own training, we came together and really built a foundation on a couple of key things for all of our training, and how that's delivered is curated by our regions.

But some of those would be service-minded, strength-driven, with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, with reflection and growth-oriented activity built in, with at the same time building those high-quality connections and inclusive community for learning, not only for our members, but for the students that we are impacting in making sure that our program is student-centered. And we're putting it out with quality, with personalized instructional coaching. Excuse me.

But yeah, no, those are the key things, and it's just, again, another way that we really decided to move forward with making sure that we're grounded because we still have to move forward as one organization, but we can still stay grounded in these key things for our training.

Adam, did I miss anything? Do you have anything to add?

Adam Maurer: Yeah, no. I mean, these are the key things that we know through positive psychology, and studies of employee engagement that are really the drivers to keeping people happy and focused on the work. And so being service-minded and sort of keeping part of the community and very growth-oriented are things that help people to learn through the challenge of the work, and help us to build at least stronger local regional community, and then find opportunity for that interconnection through the larger touchpoints that we can create from time to time.

And Brandi, as Captain AmeriCorps, has really looked to do that, as much as that's possible, through phone and webinar and other kinds of events, celebrating AmeriCorps Week, making sure everyone has cupcakes and posters and that sort of stuff. So that helps be the glue, to be part of one community, even though we can't launch the service experience as a single community any longer.

Brandi Jimenez: Thanks Adam, and thanks again you guys, but I think that wraps it up for us.

Tova Pertman: Great. Thank you so much, Brandi and Adam, for sharing your regional training structure with all of us. I know I definitely took away some lessons from that, and I think it was really useful and valuable for everyone to hear. I think whether folks may be considering a regional training structure if they're national, it can also be applicable. A lot of what you talked about could be applicable to single-state programs, if they want to, regionally within the state, work with trainings in that way. I really like how you talked about harnessing regional energy. That phrase got me a little bit excited. That's very cool.

So thank you very much, and if there are any questions for the both of you, we'll take them at the Q&A once we're finished with the speakers.

So now, it's my pleasure to introduce Virgil Looney with GRID Alternatives. And Virgil manages GRID's nationwide SolarCorps-AmeriCorps program, where members gain valuable experience in the solar and nonprofit industries to help launch their renewable energy careers while making significant contributions to GRID and the communities GRID services. Virgil has a very diverse, esteemed background, and one of the roles he had prior to what he's doing now is that he was a Bonner Scholar with KEYS Service Corps AmeriCorps.

So Virgil, I'm going to turn it over to you. Thank you.

Virgil Looney: Hi everybody. Thanks for having me and letting me join and share a little bit about GRID and our AmeriCorps program. And it was really exciting to hear from the last speakers and to also see what you all were chatting in, because it sounds like you all already have lots of great ideas and lots of great things in place. And so I think to start,

what I'm going to do is

share a little bit of background on GRID, and then our history with AmeriCorps, and then just go into some the details to the orientation and training that we provide for our AmeriCorps members.

So, GRID alternatives is based in Oakland, California. And is a non-profit solar company. So, it's a pretty interesting, unique non-profit. We provide solar services to lower income families. We are based in Oakland with offices across the state of California that serve every county in California. And then we also have an office that serves the state of Colorado, and office in Washington, DC. We also have an international program that has done work in Mexico, Nepal, and Nicaragua.

And similar to the previous speakers, we have a long history with CNCS. GRID has received funding from CNCS, from the state of California that began about ten years ago. And then in 2014 we really wanted to grow in a number of ways and we were really excited about adding and growing the, kind of, service year opportunities with GRID, because we were seeing from volunteers that had been working with us the need and the desire for more job training within solar. Because it's a growing field in the US and it's also really accessible fields where you don't need traditional academic background to gain access to it. And so that really got GRID's attention especially with our commitment to equity and inclusion work.

And so in 2014 we applied for the national direct grant, which was awarded in 2015 and so, from 2015 until now we've been the recipient for national direct grant and we have 40 AmeriCorps members placed with us every year. So, we are on the smaller side in terms of programs. And then the structure for it is similar that we have, the offices where our members are placed are these regional GRID offices across the country, but majority are in California.

So, every year we have 40 AmeriCorps members run the process of doing, kind of, final selections for 2018-2019. And the majority of our AmeriCorps members, sorry, all of them they serve in either construction, outreach or workforce development. And so they are all very field based and outward facing. And our AmeriCorps members really are our front line staff in a lot of different ways with the communities that we serve. And so are huge part in executing our mission, which is to provide solar services to all communities and make it accessible to all communities.

So, we are getting ready for our, kind of, fourth large cohort year of AmeriCorps members and this is always a stressful time for us. And also just really exciting time as we get to select the incoming AmeriCorps members. And the way that we kick off the service is with an in-person pre-service orientation and it's hosted in Oakland. And every year it's been a five day orientation. And I've been leading orientations for the last four years and I've had different previous roles and training and education and so I think I approach it more as, kind of, coming with like an education or teacher lens rather than, sort of like, an event management lens.

So, my approach for all the trainings that we do is just to have really clear purpose and outcomes. And I keep... I do as many, per kind of, literally like all the training so, there is purpose and outcomes for the entire five day orientation. And then within each one we have purpose and outcomes with different substance that we have.

And, like lots of you already said, we cover lots of the things that you all suggested and already doing. So, just kind of like the history of AmeriCorps, and then GRID relationship to AmeriCorps. And we go further prohibited activities. And I think, one think that we found that's been successful in helping people to really think about the prohibited activities more is that we go over it as a group. And, kind of, have group conversation and see if there are any initial questions and then we actually split up into pairs and then we have people go through each one and teach, the task is to teach someone else what the prohibited activity is.

And we found that when people are teaching each other, when a peer is teaching a peer, they actually retain the information a little bit better. And then there is also time when the pairs share to the group, and that's an easy time for me to see how well they understand the prohibited activities and if there is anything that we need to talk about further. So, that's one thing that I found is really helpful just in keeping the prohibited activities front and center and also making sure that people are comprehending and understanding.

Another big piece to our member orientation has to do with identifying and trying to prevent as many issues from coming up later on, and so, and for us the consistency document I think it is really just it's time, so this is about AmeriCorps, not just about GRID. Most professional workplaces, there is always challenges around communication. And that being a pretty strong focus point for us throughout our orientation and we have a couple of different activities throughout the week that all have to do with effective communication styles. And also comes up with our AmeriCorps members and managers and that's something that we take a lot of time to work on.

And with all our AmeriCorps members, really, the one big thing that unites our AmeriCorps members is their commitment to service and so, we try to tap into that commitment as much as possible, so it's front and center for the

member to come back to, especially when they are having a tough day. And so, we have an activity that's called 'mapping your year' that helps members identify the commitment and goals that they are working towards during their year of service. And then breaking it down into actionable steps and then spacing it out over the course of 12 months. So, to literally be a guide and roadmap, and that's been really helpful for me as I check-in with AmeriCorps members to really say, to be able to go over this with them and say where are you in this process, what's causing delays, if there are delays, or what are the barriers. It's something to also share with managers just so that they are aware of the goals that people are working towards. And so, that's the activity that's been really helpful.

And then another activity that we always do during our member orientation is one that's just a commitment activity, and we normally do this on the last day. And this has to do with everyone writes down a couple of different commitments they have for their year of service and then we spread them on tables in the room and then everyone goes around and picks a commitment that another person wrote and it resonates with them. And that helps to really build a stronger relationship between our AmeriCorps members and then also, I think, that helps them build greater connections of, kind of, support network of their fellow AmeriCorps members so that they know they have support within this group and other people who are working towards similar goals. And when we get feedback after orientation that's an activity that comes up a lot from our AmeriCorps members were saying it was especially powerful and helpful.

And so, in addition to our week long member orientation, we do a midyear retreat that's two days, that's also in person. So, that's a really helpful way to follow along with additional trainings that really focus on life after AmeriCorps and one of the key activities that we do during this retreat, which is about half way through the year, is the similar activity to the commitment activity but instead it's all about failures. And so, that's when people write down a few ways in which they feel that they failed over their first couple of months. And then we do similar thing where we go around and we find a failure that somebody else wrote down and that resonates with you and that again helps us build this community of trust and understanding that everyone has challenges, we all make mistakes. And there is people who have literally made the exactly same mistakes as you have in the room. And that makes people feel comfortable and safe and sets up the space pretty well for us.

And so, those are two big in-person events. And cost is always a concern to us, because we have our AmeriCorps members are all spread out, and so far it hasn't been so expensive that we've had to, kind of, re-vamp it or eliminate these in-person events. But we have looked at these similar regional models, because, especially, in California we have offices located in southern California and inland, and then also in northern California. And some of our offices, some of our regional offices have co-hosted training events with some of the neighboring offices, and that's been for everyone, not just for AmeriCorps members. We are starting to look at that as a more cost effective approach to doing more periodic trainings throughout the year. And so far those seem to be going well, and that's what I've looked at during just for the AmeriCorps members and we haven't experimented yet, but that's something that we are definitely talked about.

And then throughout the year, in addition to the two in-person trainings that I mentioned, we host a number of different webinars and internally a GRID use, we have a system called Skype for Business that makes it pretty easy to communicate between different locations. And what I normally do is I reach out to our AmeriCorps members and their managers and just ask people for feedback about things that they want to learn more about, or areas that they feel that they need more training and there is always a handful of things that we put together at the beginning of every AmeriCorps year, because they just come up pretty regularly as people need support with. So, some examples of that is just doing a computer literacy training. And we have a lot of field based staff that might not have technology education background where they have used a lot of computers before. So, that's something that has been really important for us to provide.

And we also do some basic financial training for people. And then we have a couple of sessions just on professional behavior, which looks at... again its emphasis of that one is largely around communication and different styles of communication, because we often have AmeriCorps members that haven't worked in... that haven't had to use email regularly, so there is a lot of questions about... even such simple questions as how to write a professional email, and examples of what's appropriate and what's not. So, those are some things that are pretty standard at the beginning of every year.

And then we ask for, when I ask for input, there is generally pretty similar trends and one is that people always want to work on public speaking, they want to work on giving and receiving an effective feedback. People want to learn about, they want to practice their personal elevator pitch. And another one that's been popular in the session that's called 'Learning to fail' and so, these are sessions that we've all done, that I've led remotely just over Skype for Business. And there are always challenges when you're doing these remote presentations but so far they seem to be received well and

they help our managers and our AmeriCorps members.

So, those are just a couple of examples and ways that we approach it. And that's everything that I can think of right now but I am happy to answer any questions or provide any more specific examples on exercises or different sessions that we provide.

Tova Pertman: Thank you so much Virgil and thank you very much to our guest speakers for sharing a really nice variety of approaches to member orientation and training. We really thank you and value your experience and thanks again for sharing with us. So, right now what we are going to do is take questions. So, what questions you folks have for our guest speakers and/or for us here at CNCS. We'll open up the lines as well as monitor the chat. Let me retract that. We are actually just going to take questions via the chat function. We are not going to open up the lines, so we know everyone is good at the chat function because there is an absolute wealth of experience and activities and different types of training, and who does the training. And in the chat box I actually recommend everyone, if you haven't already, to scroll and look through and try to keep for your own use and ideas for your own trainings. But for now, yeah, what questions do we have for our speakers? Or any questions in general? Please use the chat box.

Barbara Reynolds: Well, while folks are typing in this is Barbara. I just wanted to go back to a question that was chatted in a little while ago. I think it was Brandy that asked the question about where you can find the requirements for the AmeriCorps gear? Definitely in your terms and conditions. There is a specific section on identity and the logo and the AmeriCorps gear. So, I just wanted to catch that question that came up earlier.

Tova Pertman: Alright, I think questions are going to start rolling in.

Yes, let's pose this question to our speakers first. We have a question, 'We have a very little budget for training, do you have any thoughts for cost effective training?'

Let me pass that over to either Brandi, Adam, or Virgil first.

Virgil Looney: Sure, I can jump in, this is Virgil. I am always amazed when I reach out to co-workers and also just people in my personal network who are interested in providing training and are interested in having and practicing even just the public speaking, and I found out that when I reach out to people within GRID, people I get volunteers of folks who say they have something that they want to offer and often the barrier that I find is just in the coordination and doing the logistics and behind the scenes work to get things set up. And if I do that part for my co-workers and just literally make it so that they have to show up and do their thing, they love it.

And I have to build in a couple of extra things to make sure that people are really going to show up and have prepared effectively and all that. But I really try to pull internally as much as possible, and if I am willing to do the legwork for someone so they don't have to manage the logistics of like sending out invitations, and sending out the reminders, and the call in number and all that, then I must more likely to get people to sign up and share their talents.

Brandi Jimenez: Yeah, definitely. This is Brandy, I definitely echo Virgil's suggestions for sure. In another way that we cut some of our cost from central to regional obviously is the travel and lodging. But with our meeting spaces, we lean a lot on those community resources, or the other AmeriCorps programs that may have more spaces, or service programs that may have available spaces that are friends of non-profit that may offer a discount or free space. And then I know that, we have not done this at Citizens School but have done it at other non-profits that I've worked at, but it takes a lot of planning. It's a bigger risk but if you go out to a restaurant and you just say, 'Hey, this is our program and this is our mission,' they will be probably more inclined to give you discounted food or even maybe an in-kind donation for recognition for them as well. I hope that is helpful in some way.

Tova Pertman: That's great. Thank you both for sharing those ideas. And, just to add, I think in addition to, which was a great idea, looking internally within your organization for folks who could help out with trainings. Also, look to your external professional network as well for anyone who may be appropriate in whatever the area of training is that you are looking for to come speak and they provide a discount, or maybe not charge anything at all. So, that's always a useful tip as well. So, thank you so much.

Virgil, we have a question for you. Folks would love to hear more about the Learning to Fail training.

Virgil Looney: Yeah, sure. This one is really fun. Always a really popular one. I learned about this through someone named Scott Sherman, who runs an organization called the Transformative Action Institute. And so, they do a lot of train the trainer models and so I have attended some of these events to learn more from them. And one thing that they, one session that learned from them is called Learning to Fail. And the premise behind the Learning to Fail is that we have to fail in order to succeed.

So, the example is any inventor, you know, they fail 500 times before they invent the thing that finally works. And really the only way to move forward with success in a big way is by being comfortable having failures and also just

acknowledging that we all fail plenty of times, we make tons of mistakes, that is just how things go. And so, there is a whole module behind it, but the opening challenge... and it's better if you have it... it's a good thing they introduce at an even where it's... where you can re-introduce the next day or if you follow along meeting, within the next week, because one of the first challenges is to go out and try to fail as many times as possible. And it's really fun, and people go and do really funny things with their friends and co-workers and you have the request is to document it so then you can share with others.

And what's really shocking is that people often find it difficult to fail. And so, I have seen people who will go into a restaurant and say, "Can I have a free meal?" And it's amazing like how many places that actually will do that. Or, we did a training in New York City where people went to Times Square and did a whole big thing about hugging people and trying to... and seeing if people wanted to have a hug. And that was amazing that something like 95% of people wanted to have a hug.

And so, it's also that's kind of a helpful team building activity to do something that people normally do with a group of people. And the next piece to it is how people make their own luck and really the only way to make your own luck is by taking risks and putting yourself out there a little bit and by doing that you're making yourself more available for things to happen. But in order to take risks you have to be comfortable with failing sometimes.

But there is a ton of really exciting science behind it as well how humans think about failures and think about risk that would take a lot of time to talk about. But if you want to learn more the place to go would be the Transformative Action Institute.

Tova Pertman: Great. Thank you Virgil. Wonderful. Do we have any other questions? We do not have anything else coming in right now in chat box but we will give it a minute. Feel free to post any questions to speakers or to us.

Alright, it does not look like we have any other question... maybe we do?

Alright. We are going to wrap up. Thank you again to everyone for participating in the webinar. And thank you to our guest speakers and in wrapping up there are more resources at nationalservice.gov. As you know, you can find a plethora of useful information and resources there, such as links to notice of funding opportunities, branding and marketing materials, programs, fact sheets, logos, performance measurement instructions. Everything you would ever want you can find at nationalservice.gov. Also, just for you to be aware, the next webinar will be on the topic of AmeriCorps Member and Site Monitoring and Reporting Requirements. And it will take on August 23rd, from 3 to 4:30 Eastern.

So, with that we just want to say thank you again and thank you for your participation in today's webinar. Have a wonderful rest of the day everyone. Thank you everyone.