



School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Review Handbook

April 29 – May 14, 2013

This page intentionally left blank.

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
LIST OF TABLES	iii
APPENDICES	iii
1.0: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS INITIATIVE	1
1.2 WELCOME TO THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS FY13 REVIEW HANDBOOK.....	1
2.0: CNCS GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS	3
2.1 THE LIFE CYCLE OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS	3
2.2 THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS	3
2.2.1 <i>The Review Process</i>	3
2.2.2 <i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	6
3.0: PREPARING FOR THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS FY13 GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW	8
3.1 REVIEWER TIMELINE	8
3.2 KEY REVIEW FORMS	8
3.3 ENSURING EQUITABLE REVIEWS	9
3.3.1 <i>Diversity in Programs</i>	9
3.3.2 <i>Conflict of Interest</i>	10
3.3.3 <i>Bias</i>	11
3.3.4 <i>Confidentiality</i>	11
3.3.5 <i>Page Limits for Application Narratives</i>	12
4.0: REVIEWING THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS FY13 APPLICATIONS	13
4.1 THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS FY13 SELECTION CRITERIA.....	13
4.1.1 <i>Program Design (50 percent)</i>	13
4.1.1.a AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Support and Sustain School Turnaround Efforts (15 points)	13
4.1.1.b Evidence-Informed and Measurable Impact (15 points)	14
4.1.1.c AmeriCorps Member Recruitment (5 points)	15
4.1.1.d AmeriCorps Member Training (5 points)	15
4.1.1.e AmeriCorps Member Supervision (5 points)	16
4.1.1.f Member Experience (3 points)	16
4.1.1.g Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification (2 points)	16
4.1.2 <i>Organizational Capability (25 percent)</i>	17
4.1.2.a Organizational Background and Staffing (8 points)	17
4.1.2.b Sustainability (5 points)	17
4.1.2.c Compliance and Accountability (9 points)	17
4.1.2.d Continuous Improvement (3 points)	18
4.1.3 <i>Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25 percent)</i>	18
4.1.3.a Cost Effectiveness (13 points)	18
4.1.3.b Budget Adequacy (12 points)	19
4.1.4 <i>Consideration of the Performance Measures during Peer Review</i>	19
4.2 CONDUCTING THE INDIVIDUAL REVIEW.....	19
4.2.1 <i>Reading the Applications</i>	20
4.2.2 <i>Completing the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)</i>	20
4.3 PARTICIPATING IN PANEL DISCUSSIONS.....	21
4.3.1 <i>Tips for Productive Panel Discussions</i>	21
4.4 SUBMITTING FINAL IRFS.....	22
4.5 COMPLETING THE CLOSE OUT PROCESS.....	22

5.0: SUPPLEMENT FOR PANEL COORDINATORS	24
5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PANEL COORDINATOR ROLE.....	24
5.2 PREPARING FOR THE SCHOOL TURNAROUND AMERICORPS FY13 GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW	24
5.2.1 Panel Coordinator Timeline.....	24
5.2.2 Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality	25
5.2.3 Panel Introduction Call.....	25
5.3 SETTING UP YOUR PANEL FOR SUCCESS.....	26
5.3.1. Ensuring that Reviewers complete work on time.....	26
5.3.2 Ensuring that Individual Reviewer Forms are quality products.....	26
5.3.3 Ensuring Review Participant responsiveness to phone calls and/or emails	26
5.3.4 Ensuring that Reviewers have read the Notice and key documents	27
5.3.5 Creating equal “air” time for all Reviewers in the panel discussion.....	27
5.3.6 Preventing difficult interactions among panel member(s) due to personality conflict (document this in the Panel Coordinator Notes)	27
5.3.7 Preventing Review bias (you should document this in the Panel Coordinator Notes)	28
5.3.8 Assisting Reviewers who appear to struggle with the technical or other requirements of the review	28
5.4 COORDINATING YOUR PANEL.....	28
5.4.1 Interacting with the Program Officer Liaison.....	29
5.4.2 Facilitating the Panel Discussion.....	29
5.4.3 Providing Feedback on Individual Reviewer Form.....	30
5.4.4 Completing the Applicant Feedback Summary (AFS) Form	31

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants.....	3
Figure 2. The Review Process.....	4

List of Tables

Table 1. School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Timeline for Reviewers	8
Table 2. Synopsis of Review Forms	9
Table 3. School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Panel Coordinator Check-Ins.....	24
Table 4. Panel Coordinator Challenges and Possible Solutions	30

Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms	35
Appendix B: Online Resources	38
Appendix C: Writing Meaningful Comments (for Reviewers)	39

NOTE: If you have any questions or suggestions about this Handbook or any of the training materials, please email PeerReviewers@cns.gov. Emails to this address are received by review support staff and every effort is made to respond within one business day.

1.0: Introduction

1.1 The School Turnaround AmeriCorps Initiative

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps initiative is a collaborative effort by CNCS and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to improve student academic performance, academic engagement, and attendance outcomes for students in our nation’s lowest-performing elementary, middle, and high schools.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps, in coordination with local school and educational agency turnaround efforts under School Improvement Grants and Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility, will support schools and communities in improving student performance. The program reflects CNCS’s and ED’s commitment to increasing opportunities for children in disadvantaged communities through high-quality education. School Turnaround AmeriCorps also expands on the efforts of Together for Tomorrow (TFT), a cooperative initiative among ED, CNCS, and the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to boost community engagement in turning around the nation’s lowest-performing schools.

1.2 Welcome to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Review Handbook

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) has developed this Handbook and other training materials to prepare you for your role as a Review Participant in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Grant Application Review Process (GARP). As part of your training curriculum, this Handbook serves as your central reference for preparing for your review activities. For specifics about the review process, please see section 2.0 CNCS Grant Application Review Process.

CNCS has developed online Orientation Sessions that complement particular sections in this Handbook to ensure that you are fully prepared for your review experience. It is recommended that you first read through the sections of the Handbook, and then access the corresponding Orientations Sessions when indicated in the text. These Sessions include:

- AmeriCorps 101
- Understanding School Turnaround AmeriCorps Selection Criteria (Parts 1 & 2)
- Understanding the CNCS Process & Ensuring Equitable Reviews
- Reviewing the Applications & Preparing for the Grant Review

All Review Participants (Federal and External) are expected to familiarize themselves with all review material and participate in the orientation sessions.

All Orientation Sessions are required; therefore a recording of each session is available to Review Participants to ensure access and full orientation.

All training and reference materials is available on the **CNCS Reviewer Resource Webpage** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>) where Review Participants will access key forms in the appropriate electronic format. There are two types of forms for your attention: Administrative and Review Forms.

Administrative Forms include Conflict of Interest (COI) for Internal and External Reviewers and Participation Agreements for External Reviewers. These forms are available as PDFs to download, read, sign, and submit via fax or email.

The Individual Reviewer Form (IRF) is provided in a Word format to enable Reviewers to download and use the form throughout the review.

After reading this Handbook and reviewing the required orientation sessions, you will understand:

- The steps of the Review process for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 competition
- The expectations for your role and other Review Participants in the review process
- The schedule and requirements for participation in the Review process
- The School Turnaround AmeriCorps Selection Criteria that are considered in the review
- How to evaluate applications according to the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Selection Criteria
- How to write meaningful, evaluative comments for applications
- The importance of fairness and equity in the Review, and how you fit into that responsibility
- How to serve as a productive member on your review panel
- How to participate effectively in panel discussions

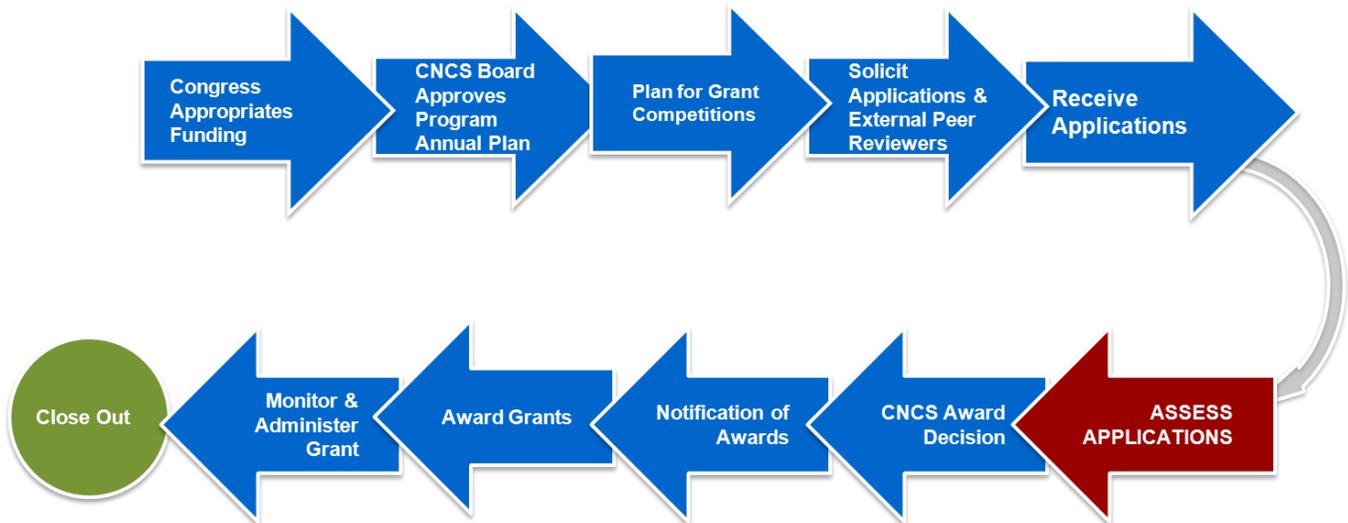
2.0: CNCS Grant Application Review Process

CNCS is a federal agency created to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering; it has become the nation’s largest grant-making agency supporting national and community service programs and volunteerism. CNCS annually engages more than five million Americans who volunteer to meet local needs and improve communities through a wide array of service opportunities. Additional information on CNCS and its programs is available online at www.nationalservice.gov.

2.1 The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants

CNCS has established a multi-step grant-making process from the appropriation of funds and awarding grants, through monitoring activities, to close out. A summary of this process is presented in Figure 1, *The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants*. A description of each step and more specifics about CNCS grant-making process is available at: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/cnsggrantreviewandselectionprocessdescription.pdf>.

Figure 1: The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants



2.2 The School Turnaround AmeriCorps Grant Application Review Process

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 competition will utilize a Blended Review process to assess applications. This process includes External Review Participants, serving as Reviewers or Panel Coordinators, and (Internal Review Participants) federal staff from CNCS and ED serving as Reviewers. Each panel, consisting of external Review Participants, CNCS staff, and ED staff, will conduct individual reviews and panel discussions for each eligible application. The **Assess Applications** step, highlighted in Figure 1, is where you, as a Review Participant of the Blended Review model, are contributing to the CNCS grant process.

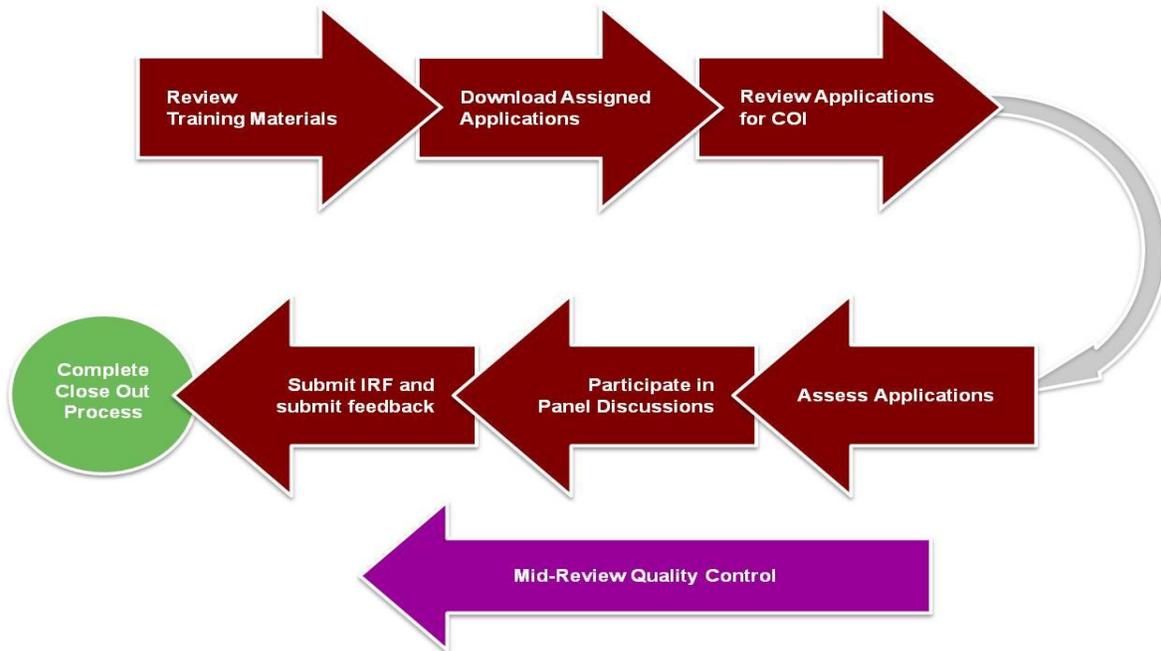
2.2.1 The Review Process

The purpose of this review process is to identify the highest-quality applications based on the Selection Criteria published in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (*Notice*) that are established in CNCS regulations and applicable statutes. CNCS carefully chooses Review Participants for their expertise and ability to objectively assess the quality of proposed projects. Review Participants are not making judgments or determinations on whether

applications should be funded, but are providing an assessment of the quality of the applications. CNCS and ED Senior Staff will make all funding recommendations and utilize review results as input to help inform those recommendations.

CNCS has developed a process for conducting the Review of grant applications, which is depicted in Figure 2, *The Review Process*. Each step is briefly described below. An in-depth discussion of these steps and your activities in the review process is provided in subsequent sections of this Handbook.

Figure 2: The Review Process



Reviewer Training and Orientation Materials: All Review Participants are required to review the training materials including this Handbook and a series of Orientation Sessions. This ensures that Review Participants are fully prepared for their role, in order to provide a meaningful review and standardized assessment of the applications.

Download Assigned Applications: A set of applications is assigned to each panel and made available for download through eGrants, CNCS' s Web-based system, to support grant management and competitions. Each panel only has access to its assigned applications.

Review Applications for Conflicts of Interest (COI): The first step in beginning your review of an application is to determine if there are any potential conflicts of interest. This must take place within the first day of receiving panel assignments, prior to delving into the technical content of the application in case recusals or reassignments are necessary.

Assess Applications: Each Reviewer conducts a detailed individual review of each assigned application according to the Selection Criteria specified by CNCS in the *Notice*. The individual review includes reading the application, providing a rating for each element, and commenting on strengths and weaknesses. Each Reviewer prepares a draft Individual Reviewer Form (IRF) documenting his/her assessment of each application and submits the IRF to the Panel Coordinator for review. Panel Coordinators use the information from the Reviewers' draft IRFs in preparation for the Panel Discussion (looking at the Ratings selected for each criterion, and the overall level of [dis]agreement). After the Panel Discussions, Reviewers may return to their IRFs to amend their comments and

ratings to ensure that they reflect their conclusive assessment. For more specific information, please see **Preparing IRFs** below.

Participate in Panel Discussion: Reviewers participate in a discussion with their panel for each assigned application to share thoughts and discuss their assessments. Each panel has an assigned Panel Coordinator who will help prepare the Reviewers for the discussions, and facilitate the discussions. **While consensus is not a requirement of the Panel Discussion, Reviewers are asked to listen and consider the assessments and findings of fellow panel members to ensure that each are giving full and fair consideration to the application's quality and Selection Criteria.** The Panel Coordinator will guide the panel to discuss only the relevant aspects of the application in their assessment, consider the areas of agreement and disagreement, and ensure that each Reviewer is addressing only relevant aspects of the application in his/her assessment.

Preparing IRFs: Reviewers will re-examine their IRFs and proofread for grammar and other elements, before sending to the Panel Coordinator.

- **Comments:** Each Reviewer will complete the Reviewer Comments section and provide factual and constructive comments on his/her assessment of the applications.
 - The Reviewer Overall Comments should not contain any direct suggestions or recommendations for improvement, and should only address the quality of the information that was in the application (as required by the Selection Criteria).
 - The comments must focus on the most relevant, Strengths and Weaknesses that had the greatest impact on the selected Ratings for the different Selection Criteria elements. Please provide a "+" or "-" to indicate a strength or a weakness next to the comment.
- **Edit IRFs:** After the Panel Discussion, Reviewers are required to return to their IRFs to amend their comments and ratings to ensure that they reflect their conclusive assessment.

Receive Feedback on IRFs: Each IRF will be reviewed by the Panel Coordinator, and several may be reviewed by the Program Officer Liaison. This is to ensure that the Reviewer has met the standards required for addressing the Selection Criteria, written appropriate comments, and factored the ratings appropriately. If the forms are not satisfactory, they will be returned for revision.

Mid-Review Quality Control: Based on the scores received from the IRFs, the GARP Liaison will alert the panel if an application will require a Mid-Review Quality Control (MRQC). The MRQC recommendation is determined by the distance between the highest total score and lowest total score of the Reviewers on that panel for each application. This is important as the final overall score for each application will be derived from the average of Reviewer scores. Thus, if a wide range in scores is present, then the validity of the average would be affected. Thus, the panel will receive notification that the application in question is noted for Mid-Review Quality Control. The panel will need to revisit their discussion, and subsequently revisit their assessments in the IRF (both comments and ratings). The goal is to ensure that each application receives full consideration of the Selection Criteria based on a common understanding of the criteria and the rating system, and a comprehensive application of a Reviewer's expertise. The MRQC can add additional time to a panel's schedule, so your Panel Coordinator will work with you to ensure that this alignment is incorporated.

Compile Application Feedback Summary: Each Panel Coordinator will complete the Applicant Feedback Summary form by copying the relevant comments from each Reviewer's IRF into the AFS. Additional instruction can be found in the Panel Coordinator Supplement.

Complete Close Out Process: Both External and Internal Review Participants will complete a Close-Out process including: disposing of confidential review materials properly, providing feedback in the Review Process Evaluation, and ensuring that you have satisfied all of the review requirements. External Review Participants will need to satisfy these requirements in order to receive the honorarium payment.

2.2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

There are several important roles in the review process, and the general responsibilities, along with expectations and interactions, are listed below. Please note that this Handbook provides detailed guidance on only the Reviewer role; a separate Panel Coordinator supplement is provided for Panel Coordinators.

Reviewer

Reviewers assess applications according to the published Selection Criteria. Primary responsibilities include: completing high-quality IRFs, participating in panel discussions, and finalizing the assessment of an application on the IRFs after the panel discussion. There will be four Reviewers assigned to each panel: two External Reviewers, one ED Staff Reviewer, and one CNCS Staff Reviewer. An additional External Reviewer will act as the Panel Coordinator. Reviewers interact primarily with Panel Coordinators and are expected to be consistently responsive to their requests.

In addition to reviewing training and background materials, reporting any actual or potential conflict of interest, and complying with confidentiality expectations, Reviewers are held to a standard of producing **high quality IRFs and their timely submission**.

Panel Coordinator

Each panel will have a Panel Coordinator whose primary responsibilities are to guide, support, and monitor the work of the Reviewers assigned to his/her panel; manage panel logistics; provide feedback to Reviewers on their IRFs; and facilitate the Panel Discussions. The Panel Coordinator works in several capacities to ensure that Reviewers complete a thorough, non-biased review that aligns with the Selection Criteria.

Panel Coordinators are expected to: review training and background materials, report any actual or potential conflicts of interest and comply with confidentiality expectations.

They also serve as the primary liaison between the panel and the CNCS Review Coordinators. Panel Coordinators are the first point of contact to both their Reviewers and CNCS regarding any concerns or information for the panel. Panel Coordinators interact with Reviewers and help resolve any conflicts among the panel members. If any panel anomalies arise, the Panel Coordinator should immediately notify the GARP Liaison who will determine next steps.

Grant Application Review Process (GARP) Liaison

Each panel will be assigned a GARP Liaison who will answer all process-related questions and provide all administrative and logistic support to the panel. The GARP Liaison can provide assistance with obtaining grant applications and administrative forms (electronic versions), access to review resources, reminders throughout the process, and assistance with navigating in eGrants screens. The GARP Liaison is the point of contact (after the Panel Coordinator) for any immediate needs with review materials or any roadblocks encountered in participating in the review and completing the review process.

High Quality IRFs SHOULD:

- Only include comments that address School Turnaround AmeriCorps Selection Criteria
- Reflect writing that is clear and concise
- Ensure comments do not contradict each other
- Ensure comments are aligned with and support the rating selection for each section
- Be free of spelling and grammar errors
- Contain no inflammatory language
- Include relevant comments to inform the Applicant Feedback Summary
- Be submitted in a timely manner

Program Officer Liaison (POL)

Each panel will be assigned a Program Officer Liaison from CNCS whose main responsibility is to serve as a resource to the panel on programmatic elements. Interactions with the POL are primarily done through the Panel Coordinator. The POL can provide clarification or guidance on an aspect of the Selection Criteria that panel members may not understand, and can be consulted to clarify aspects of the AmeriCorps Selection Criteria.

The POL will also follow up (as needed) with Panel Coordinators on areas that the panel may need to revisit, in Panel Discussions or assessments (as with the Mid-Review Quality Control). **All correspondence with POLs should be sent (by the Panel Coordinator on the panel's behalf) to AmeriCorpsPOL@cns.gov and include your Panel # in the Subject.**

Additional expectations for POL interactions will be provided to Panel Coordinators during the Panel Coordinator Check-In calls.

3.0: Preparing for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Grant Application Review

Prior to commencing the grant application review process, you must complete the orientation session requirements and become familiar with key background material. The *Notice* and the Application Instructions govern the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 competition (see Appendix B). These documents detail the requirements and Selection Criteria that applicants use to write their applications, and that you will use to evaluate the applications. Your comprehensive understanding of these requirements and documents is critical to a fair, successful, and objective review.

In addition to reviewing training resources and background material, Reviewers must address Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality considerations. These topics are discussed in this section, as well as the key review forms and the Reviewer timeline.

3.1 Reviewer Timeline

The review process (excluding orientation sessions and other preliminary steps) spans 12 business days. *Table 1* provides a snapshot of the Reviewer Timeline. For the complete timeline, please see the **CNCS Reviewer Resource Webpage** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>). Your Panel Coordinator will provide specific dates and details for your panel.

Table 1: School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Timeline for Reviewers

Date	Task
Mon 4/29/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive panel assignments • Download applications from eGrants • Preview all applications for Conflicts of Interest (COI) • Download COI Statement and Reviewer Participation Agreement from Reviewer Resource Page
Tue 4/30/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit COI Statement and Participation Agreement to CNCS (email/fax) • Read first group of applications • Begin review/asses first group of applications
Tue-Wed 4/30-5/1/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete review of first group of applications, submit draft IRFs in Word (to Panel Coordinator)
Tues 5/14/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Close Out Process of Review

3.2 Key Review Forms

Review Participants will be involved in the development of documents that will inform review results. A copy of each form is provided on the **CNCS Reviewer Resource Web page** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>).

Below is a table summarizing the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF) and the Applicant Feedback Summary (AFS):

Table 2: Synopsis of Review Products

	Purpose	Audience	Use	Content
Individual Reviewer Form <i>(Reviewers)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To document a Reviewer’s individual assessment of one application To provide useful feedback to CNCS, ED on the application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel Coordinator CNCS, ED Staff Public (potentially subject to FOIA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies strengths and weaknesses in an application Used by CNCS, ED to inform decision-making process Used by PC to develop the Applicant Feedback Summary form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments and Ratings on the Selection Criteria Selected comments for Applicant Feedback
Applicant Feedback Summary Form <i>(Panel Coordinator)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide the applicant with a logical synopsis of how panel members viewed its application To provide useful feedback to CNCS, ED on the application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CNCS, ED Staff Public (potentially subject to FOIA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies strengths and weaknesses in an application Used by CNCS, ED to inform decision-making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represents a reasonable alignment with the overall panel score average Reflects differing viewpoints on a particular criterion

3.3 Ensuring Equitable Reviews

3.3.1 Diversity in Programs

As you review the applications, you may notice a high level of diversity among School Turnaround AmeriCorps proposals. This is common and is encouraged and embraced in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program, as School Turnaround AmeriCorps programs are not seen as standard, or cookie-cutter proposals. You may notice that there is diversity in program models and designs, location, size, scope, organization type, and target populations. Understanding and expecting these differences will help you evaluate an applicant’s proposed project in a fair and objective manner. Some areas of potential diversity of the School Turnaround AmeriCorps applications include:

- Performance Measures/Service Categories
 - Out-of-the-box selections and combinations
- Type of Organization
 - Intermediary, Indian tribes, Individual Schools, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), State Education Agencies (SEAs), nonprofits and all the other organizations eligible to apply
- Scope
 - Single city or county, state-wide, multi-state or national organization, single school or multiple schools
- Program Model
 - Youth Corps, Community Corps, Encore, etc.
- Program Design
 - Team-based, individually placed, working in pairs, in class, after school, etc.
- Program Size

REQUIRED ONLINE ORIENTATION SESSION:
 "Understanding the CNCS Process & Ensuring Equitable Reviews"

- Large, small, partnering or network
- Target Populations
 - Various grade levels, Rural residents, low income individuals, Native Americans, New Americans, Older Americans (seniors), Communities of Color

3.3.2 Conflict of Interest

CNCS implements several procedures throughout the review process to ensure fair and equitable reviews. One such procedure is requiring all Reviewers to report any actual or potential conflicts of interest concerning the competition and applications assigned to them. Each Review Participant must complete a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement (COI Agreement) for the applications they are assigned to review. This is found on the **Reviewer Resource Webpage** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>).

REQUIRED ONLINE ORIENTATION SESSION

*External Reviewers and federal Staff Reviewers have separate and unique Conflict of Interest Forms to complete. **Please ensure you are reviewing and completing the appropriate form.***

*Additionally, **ALL federal staff Reviewers** are required to take the “2013 LMS Training on Conflict of Interests for CNCS Staff Reviewers.” This training is also provided on the Reviewer Resource Webpage noted above.*

Because of the unique nature of the review process and the sensitivity of the information through the review, **CNCS determines the potential for both Direct (actual) and Indirect (perceived) conflicts of interest as defined below.**

- A direct conflict of interest – often through personal involvement, connection to, or benefit from an application submitted to CNCS
- An indirect conflict of interest – through various forms of affiliation, personally or professionally with an applicant institution

Prior to reviewing any grant applications, you must inform CNCS of any potential conflicts of interest or appearances thereof. If you become aware of any potential conflict of interest as you review an application, you must immediately notify a CNCS representative (your Panel Coordinator or GARP Liaison). This notification should happen directly via phone or email. CNCS will determine how to handle any appearances of perceived or actual conflicts of interest and will inform you regarding what further steps, if any, to take. It is possible that you will not be able to serve as a Reviewer or Panel Coordinator for this grant competition if you have a conflict of interest or even if it would *appear* to others that you have a conflict of interest.

Be sure to examine your applications and alert your GARP Liaison of any potential conflict of interest.

When examining conflicts of interest, you should also treat the following people’s interests as if they were yours: any affiliation or relationship of your spouse, your minor child, a relative living in your immediate household, or anyone who is legally your partner with any of the relationships above. Examples of potentially biasing affiliations or relationships are listed below (see the COI Statement for more information).

- **Your personal submission of an application to CNCS**
- **Affiliation with an applicant institution. A conflict may be present if you have/hold (a):**
 - Current employment, are being considered for employment, or are consulting, advising, or other similar affiliation at the institution
 - Any formal or informal employment arrangement with the institution

- Current membership on a visiting committee, board or similar body at the institution
- Current enrollment as a student
- Received and retained an honorarium or award from the institution within the last 12 months
- Personal financial interest that would be affected by the outcome of this grant competition
- Organization that is a potential sub-recipient, named in an intermediary application (as a pre-selected subgrantee), or is an actual applicant in the pre-award competition conducted by an intermediary organization applying for this competition
- **Relationship with someone who has personal interest in the proposal or other application, such as:**
 - Related by marriage or through family membership
 - Past or present business, professional, academic, volunteer or personal relationship
 - Employment at the institution within the last 12 months
 - Collaboration on a project or on a book, article, report or paper within the last 48 months

NOTE: Complete and submit your COI Agreement by **April 30, 2013**
Be sure to follow the directions on the COI Agreement for submission.

3.3.3 Bias

Bias, or a loss of impartiality, is one of those weaknesses that we all have the potential for, some of us exercise it, but none of us want to acknowledge that we have it. Bias is a preference or inclination that may inhibit impartial judgment or objectivity. One's bias is not limited to a negative judgment, or dislike of an application, and is more often found in favor, or an unfounded positive preference of an applicant or an aspect of an application.

Often, we are unaware of a bias that we have, sometimes flagged by another Review Participant, based on a comment that we make, or a consistent inflation or deflation in our assessment. Our biases are often rooted in our opinions and past experiences—which you are asked to bring in a structured format to this review. Utilizing your opinion in some ways, but not in others can be difficult to separate—especially as it is likely that a positive inclination or preference may be founded in your passion and excitement about a program. It is important that you are open to reconsideration should the issue of potential bias come to light. The Panel Coordinator also remains objective throughout the Review, and they may likely address a concern of bias with panel members during the review.

To avoid the insertion of bias, all Reviewers are asked to base their assessments solely on the facts and assertions contained in the application, return to re-evaluate an application, if needed; eliminate consideration of outside sources or information, and exercise consideration and respect throughout the review.

3.3.4 Confidentiality

Your designation as a Review Participant gives you access to information not generally available to the public and accords you with special professional and ethical responsibilities. Panelists are given access to information about applicants for use only during the evaluation process and for discussion only with fellow panel members and CNCS personnel. Therefore, you must not use that information for your personal benefit or make it available for the benefit of any other individual or organization. You may, however, share any general information about CNCS that you learn.

After you complete your work as a Review Participant, you may maintain archival copies of review-related information. If you choose to keep archival copies, you must maintain them in a manner consistent with your confidentiality obligations. If you choose not to maintain archival copies, you must dispose of the information in a manner consistent with confidentiality obligations.

CNCS is committed to Open Government policy, and may make the names of external Review Participants available to the public after awards are made. However, your confidentiality with regard to the specific applications you reviewed will be maintained: Review Participant's names for the application reviews will be protected to the extent provided by law. By policy, CNCS does not release the name of federal staff reviewers. Details regarding confidentiality obligations are provided and discussed in the *Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement for Review Participants* (available on Reviewer Resource Webpage).

3.3.5 Page Limits for Application Narratives

Applicants may not exceed 20 double-spaced pages for the narratives, including the executive summary and cover page, as the pages print out from eGrants. This limit does not include the budget and performance measures or required supplementary materials (e.g., Letters of Support).

Reviewers will not consider submitted material that is over the page limit. If your panel has an application that exceeds the 20-page limit, the Panel Coordinator should contact your GARP Liaison for a final determination and guidance. Review Participants must follow CNCS guidance, as this is a matter of equity to all applicants.

Please do not visit any Web page or research any information about an applicant, even if they include the link in the application.

4.0: Reviewing the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Applications

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Grant Application Review Process (GARP) is based on a non-consensus model – meaning you do not need to reach consensus (unified group agreements) regarding the assessment of an application. Different perspectives and opinions are acceptable and welcomed.

Each Reviewer is assigned to a panel consisting of one External Reviewer, one ED Staff Reviewer, one CNCS Staff Reviewer, and an External Panel Coordinator. Each panel is assigned between six and eight applications, which are reviewed individually by each Reviewer and then discussed collectively by the entire panel on a rolling basis.

4.1 The School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Selection Criteria

Reviewers will be asked to assess the quality and comprehensiveness of the response to each criterion as a whole.

4.1.1 Program Design (50 percent)

The desired outcomes of School Turnaround AmeriCorps are to improve the academic performance, academic engagement, and/or attendance outcomes of students in eligible schools. In assessing Program Design, reviewers will examine the degree to which the applicant demonstrates how AmeriCorps members are particularly well-suited to deliver effective turnaround interventions and achieve the desired student outcomes in these schools.

All applications must identify the schools that will participate in grant activities and demonstrate that they will serve eligible schools not currently served by a national service program (e.g. AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA, or Foster Grandparents Program) or will support expansion and better coordination of existing national service activities in those schools to be considered eligible for funds.

**REQUIRED ONLINE
ORIENTATION
SESSION:**

"Understanding the School
Turnaround AmeriCorps
Selection Criteria "

4.1.1.a AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Support and Sustain School Turnaround Efforts (15 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Need(s) identified by eligible partner school(s) and LEA leadership.
- Description of AmeriCorps member activities.
- The number of AmeriCorps members requested under the proposed project.
- The types of slots (service terms) needed for these members. If requesting different slot types, explain how the different slot types align with the program design and activities.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the number and type of AmeriCorps members is reasonable in relation to the program design, activities, and objectives.
- The extent to which the applicant has demonstrated that the use of AmeriCorps members is a suitable and effective means for accomplishing objectives that it would not otherwise accomplish through existing staff and/or volunteers.
- The extent to which the potential contribution of AmeriCorps members addresses the needs identified by eligible school and LEA leadership.

- For applicants that propose to serve multiple school sites, the extent to which the applicant coordinates its turnaround efforts among those sites and takes advantage of the scale of the project (e.g., through economies of scale).
- The extent to which the project addresses multiple student needs and is aligned with comprehensive school turnaround plans, including the extent to which the proposed project incorporates at least one, or preferably more than one, of the following:
 - Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.
 - Establishing a school culture and environment that improves school safety, attendance, and discipline and addresses other non-academic factors that impact student achievement, such as students' social, emotional, and health needs.
 - Accelerating students' acquisition of reading and mathematics knowledge and skills.
 - Increasing graduation rates through strategies such as early warning systems, credit-recovery programs and re-engagement strategies.
 - Increasing college enrollment rates through college preparation counseling assistance to include completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and college applications, and educating students and their families on financial literacy for college.
 - Supporting school implementation of increased learning time.

4.1.1.b Evidence-Informed and Measurable Impact (15 points)

All applications must demonstrate that the proposed project would use evidence-informed interventions. An intervention is evidence-informed if it is supported by evidence of promise or a strong theory. The definitions of these levels of evidence are provided in Appendix A of the *Notice*.

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- The evidence supporting the intervention.
- National Performance Measure targets and the determination for these targets.
- Plan for collecting data, reporting outcomes, and using data to target services.
- *For Existing AmeriCorps Programs Only:* Outline the existing AmeriCorps program impact, including a description of the performance outcomes against objectives during the last full year of program operation. If performance outcomes were not met, provide an explanation and demonstrate a plan for improvement.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the objectives and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.
- Whether the interventions AmeriCorps members and volunteers will engage in are evidence-informed.
- The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that the proposed project likely will have a notable positive impact as measured by the importance or magnitude of the effect on improving student academic performance, academic engagement, and/or attendance outcomes.
- The extent to which the intervention will be targeted to students based on needs.
- The extent to which the applicant convincingly links the identified need, proposed member and volunteer interventions, and the anticipated outcomes.
- The extent to which the applicant has established plans to measure and collect reporting requirement data and National Performance Measure outcomes and outputs.

4.1.1.c AmeriCorps Member Recruitment (5 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Plans for recruiting and selecting AmeriCorps members for the program.
- Applicant’s plans for recruiting members from the local communities to be served or traditionally underrepresented AmeriCorps member populations, including applicant’s history of working with traditionally underrepresented AmeriCorps member populations or plans to ensure success if this is a new member population being recruited. Underrepresented member populations may include new Americans, low-income individuals, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds (sometimes also referred to as “opportunity youth”), rural residents, older Americans, veterans, people of color, Native Americans, and people with disabilities.
- Plans to coordinate the recruitment and selection of AmeriCorps members with school leadership and staff.
- *Tutoring Programs Only:* A demonstration of how the program complies with AmeriCorps qualification requirements for tutoring programs. See 45 CFR §§ 2522.900-2522.950.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the AmeriCorps member recruitment plan is likely to be effective.
- The extent to which the program demonstrates it will recruit and select AmeriCorps members that have the relevant experience, qualifications and/or skills to provide the service activities in which they will be engaged.
- The extent to which the application has a plan and infrastructure to recruit AmeriCorps members from the local communities to be served by the program or from traditionally underrepresented populations.

4.1.1.d AmeriCorps Member Training (5 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Plans for orienting members to AmeriCorps, the community they are serving, their placement site(s), and the service they will perform.
- Plans for providing members with opportunities to share best practices and lessons learned to promote effectiveness of interventions.
- Plans for ongoing training, including anticipated training topics and the timeline, provided to AmeriCorps members throughout the term of service and the skills the AmeriCorps members will acquire during the term of service, including training on prohibited activities.
- Plans to coordinate the training of AmeriCorps members with school leadership and staff.
- *Tutoring Programs Only:* A demonstration of how the program complies with AmeriCorps training requirements for tutoring programs. See 45 CFR §§ 2522.900-2522.950.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The adequacy of the AmeriCorps member orientation and ongoing training to prepare members for service activities they will perform and to ensure their success.
- Whether AmeriCorps members and generated volunteers are made aware of the rules regarding prohibited activities.
- The extent to which the member orientation and training is coordinated with school leadership and staff.

4.1.1.e AmeriCorps Member Supervision (5 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Plan for supervising AmeriCorps members, including identifying who will supervise the AmeriCorps members.
- Plan for selecting and training supervisors of AmeriCorps members.
- Plans to coordinate the supervision of AmeriCorps members with school leadership and staff.
- *Tutoring Programs Only:* A demonstration of how the program complies with AmeriCorps supervision requirements for tutoring programs. See 45 CFR §§ 2522.900-2522.950.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the supervision plan ensures that AmeriCorps members will receive adequate support and guidance throughout the program year.
- The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the supervisors.
- The extent to which the member supervision is coordinated with school leadership and staff.

4.1.1.f Member Experience (3 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- The program component(s) that enable AmeriCorps members to have service experiences that produce community impact and lead to continued civic participation.
- The program component(s) that foster an AmeriCorps identity and connectivity with other AmeriCorps and national service participants.
- Plans for providing members with opportunities to share best practices and lessons learned that encourages AmeriCorps members' sustained participation in the ongoing efforts to turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the applicant will foster an AmeriCorps identity for its members, specifically members identifying as such to community members, partners, and the general public.
- The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it will provide opportunities for members to reflect on and learn from their service in a manner that fosters a connection to the school turnaround efforts around the nation.
- The extent to which the program is likely to promote a lifelong ethic of service and continued civic participation amongst AmeriCorps members.

4.1.1.g Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification (2 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- The efforts taken to produce a strong AmeriCorps brand for this project.
- Plan for using the AmeriCorps name and logo on websites, service gear, and public materials, including use by subgrantees, affiliates, or service locations.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factor:

- The extent to which the organization demonstrates a commitment to branding national service, particularly by building a strong AmeriCorps program identity within the grantee, subgrantees, affiliates, and/or service locations.

4.1.2 Organizational Capability (25 percent)

4.1.2.a Organizational Background and Staffing (8 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- The applicant’s mission and a brief description of its history.
- The program staffing and management structure.
- Roles, responsibilities and relevant experience of staff. If positions are currently vacant, please describe the desired qualifications for each open position.
- Plans for providing financial and programmatic orientation and training and technical assistance to staff.
- The applicant’s prior experience administering AmeriCorps grants or other federal funds.
- The applicant’s record of launching new initiatives and/or scaling initiatives.
- For Existing AmeriCorps Programs Only: A description of how the AmeriCorps program is integrated and supported within the organization, including evidence of how well the organization has managed the program, its performance, and its record of compliance and responsiveness.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the organization has the experience, staffing, and management structure to plan, implement, and evaluate the proposed project.
- The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the key program personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.
- The extent to which the organization has the necessary plans and infrastructure to provide programmatic and fiscal oversight, day-to-day operational support, and data collection.

4.1.2.b Sustainability (5 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Involvement of eligible school and LEA leadership in designing and implementing the program.
- Plans for building partnerships and capacity to support the project.
- *Multi-State Applicant Only:* A description of the consultation efforts with each State Commission in the states in which the applicant plans to operate. (Note that consultation is not required for Indian Tribes.)
- The applicant’s track record raising funds to support service activities and initiatives.
- Plans for ensuring that the impact of the program will extend beyond the grant period.
- The percentage of the applicant’s total organization operational budget this proposed funding request from CNCS represents. If a multi-state applicant, please include any State Commission funding requests, if applicable, to calculate the percentage of the total operational budget.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- Likelihood of effectiveness of the applicant’s plan for securing school and community support for, and involvement in, the proposed project.
- Likelihood of the project contributing to the sustainability of school turnaround efforts beyond the grant period.

4.1.2.c Compliance and Accountability (9 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Plans to prevent and detect compliance issues related to AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including those related to prohibited activities.
- Plan for holding the organization, subgrantees, and service site locations accountable if instances of risk or noncompliance are identified.
- *For Current Grantees and Former Grantees Only:* A demonstration of compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Describe any compliance issues and areas of weakness/risk identified during the last full year of program operation at the organization, subgrantees, and service site locations. Provide an explanation of the issue/weakness and describe the corrective action(s) taken and, as appropriate, plan(s) for improvement. Provide the AmeriCorps member enrollment and retention rate for the last full year of program operation. If either was less than 100% provide an explanation, and describe a plan for improvement.
 - *Enrollment rate* is calculated as slots filled plus refill slots filled divided by slots awarded.
 - *Retention rate* is calculated as the number of AmeriCorps members exited with award (full or partial award) divided by the number of AmeriCorps members enrolled.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factor:

- The extent to which the organization has the ability and structure to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including those related to prohibited activities at the grantee, subgrantee, and service location level.

4.1.2.d Continuous Improvement (3 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Plans for soliciting timely and regular feedback from internal and external stakeholders including school and LEA staff, students, and families, to inform continuous improvement efforts.
- Plans for using data on student academic performance, academic engagement, and/or behavioral outcomes to inform continuous improvement.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the continuous improvement plan will include the use of data or performance feedback.
- The extent to which the continuous improvement plan will permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes and opportunity for ongoing corrections.

4.1.3 Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25 percent)

4.1.3.a Cost Effectiveness (13 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- A demonstration that the costs are reasonable in relation to the scope, scale, and impact of the proposed project.
- A discussion of how the program is a cost-effective approach to address the need and achieve the stated objectives. Consider the total costs and benefits of the program and, to the extent possible, document the costs and benefits. Compare the cost effectiveness of the program with the costs and benefits of alternative models or approaches (if available), and demonstrate how the program model is most cost effective. For further information on cost effectiveness analysis, see OMB "Circular No. A-94 Revised" (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a094).
- A description of how the resources requested will supplement, and not supplant, SIG funding or other existing school funding streams.

- For existing AmeriCorps programs: All existing AmeriCorps programs requesting a higher cost per MSY than previous years must include a compelling rationale for this increased cost. This applies even if the increased cost per MSY is less than the maximum or if the increase is due to increased costs associated with the grant.
- If any of the special circumstances stated below have an impact on the organizational capability that has not already been discussed, please describe the circumstance and how it affects cost effectiveness.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project. (Note that an applicant with a low cost per member has a competitive advantage under this criterion. Applicants with a program design that achieves equal results at a lower cost will be advantaged over programs that achieve similar results at a higher cost.)
- Special Circumstances: CNCS may take into account the following circumstances of individual programs: program age; the extent to which the program expands to new sites; whether the program is located in a resource-poor community, such as a rural or remote community, a community with a high poverty rate, or a community with a scarcity of corporate or philanthropic resources; whether the program is located in a high-cost, economically distressed community, measured by applying appropriate Federal and state data; and whether the reasonable and necessary costs of the program are higher because they are associated with engaging or serving difficult-to-reach populations, or achieving greater program impact as evidenced through performance measures and program evaluation.

4.1.3.b Budget Adequacy (12 points)

When addressing this criterion, please provide the following information:

- Identify the non-CNCS funding and resources necessary to support the project.
- Discuss the adequacy of the budget to support the program design and objectives.
- Indicate the amount of non-CNCS resource commitments (in-kind and cash) secured to date and the sources of these commitments. Indicate plans for securing additional resource commitments, potential sources, and timeline.

When considering the above information, reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the following factors:

- The extent to which the budget is clear and in alignment with the program narrative.
- The extent to which the budget includes sufficient resources to carry out the program effectively.
- The extent to which the program will obtain financial and in-kind resources to support program implementation.
- Whether an applicant adequately budgets for its required share of costs.

4.1.4 Consideration of the Performance Measures during Peer Review

Each applicant's Performance Measures are included at the end of their narrative. The content from the Performance Measures should be considered while making assessments. This is discussed in Orientation Session II: School Turnaround AmeriCorps Selection Criteria.

4.2 Conducting the Individual Review

Reviewers will assess the application based on the Selection Criteria published in the *Notice*: Program Design, Organizational Capability, and Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy. Program Design will be assessed with a particular focus on evidence of effectiveness for the proposed solution(s) to support and sustain school turnaround efforts, appropriateness of national service as a solution, and potential quality of the member experience. Reviewers will further assess the Organizational Capability and Budget & Cost Effectiveness for comprehensiveness and feasibility of the application based on the Selection Criteria.

Reviewers will assign a rating to each element, and highlight the application’s significant strengths and weaknesses relative to each Selection Criteria in written comments that justify the rating selected.

Significant Strengths & Weaknesses

An identified Strength or Weakness **has an effect on the overall quality of the applicant’s response to the Criteria**. A significant Strength or Weakness often shows that the applicant has an understanding (or lack) of a key issue in program implementation or management.

4.2.1 Reading the Applications

The applications that you will be assessing are generally reviewed in two groups and it is important to read the applications in the order that your panel will discuss them. Your goal is to focus on assessing how well the application has addressed the identified Selection Criteria described above. Your assigned applications will be made available in eGrants on the first day of the Review Period: April 29th.

Do not feel as if you have to produce one or more “highly-rated” applications. Although applicants are competing against each other, **Reviewers should consider the applications significant strengths and weaknesses when measured against the Selection Criteria, NOT measured against other applications**. The goal for Reviewers when reading an application is to seek out information in the application that enables you to answer the following questions:

- Does the application address the Selection Criteria?
 - If yes, to what degree and what is the quality/feasibility of what is proposed?
 - If not, what is lacking or unclear?

Some information related to the criteria may be found in different sections of the proposal. In as much as the information relates to the quality of the proposal in addressing the specific criteria, it should be considered. It is equally important not to assess a single negative component of the proposal under multiple criteria.

4.2.2 Completing the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)

All Reviewers must complete an IRF for each application assigned to their panel. There are three components to the IRF:

1. **Rating** the application,
2. Providing **comments** on strengths and weaknesses for the element that justifies the rating selected.
3. Adding the **Total Score**

How to complete the Individual Review Form:

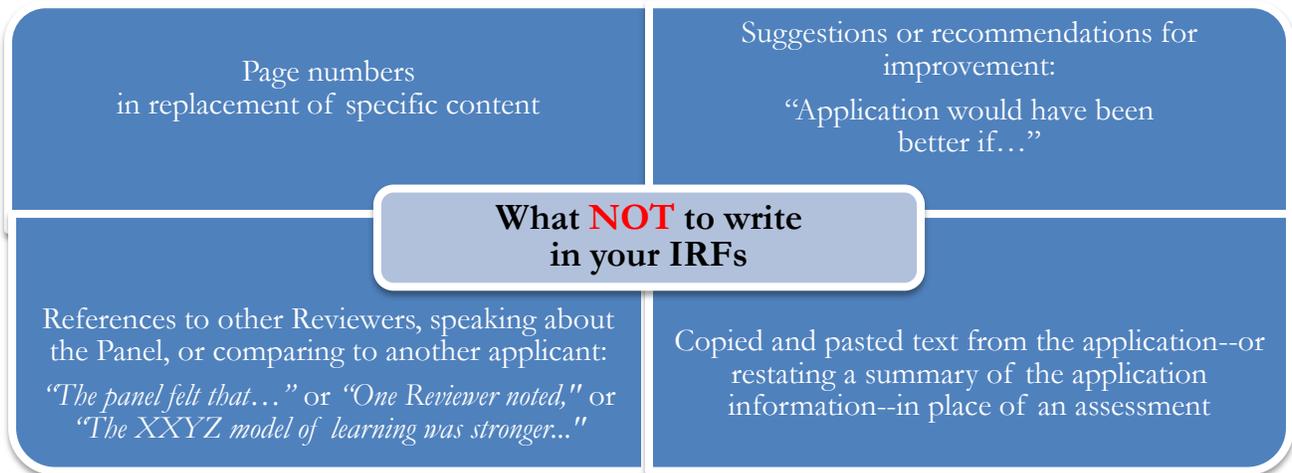
1. Complete draft IRF
2. Submit to Panel Coordinator for review
3. Receive feedback from Panel Coordinator (and POL) and address/incorporate prior to Panel Discussion
4. Return to your IRF after the Panel Discussion to adjust scores and ratings based on any new information that has come to light during the discussion.

In the IRF, you will evaluate the extent to which the application meets the selection criteria elements specified in the *Notice*. Each element will be rated as *Excellent*, *Above Average*, *Average*, *Below Average*, or *Poor*. Specific definitions for each rating are provided in the Review Rubric (available on the Reviewer Resource page). Your assessment is based on your evaluation of the quality of the applicant’s response to the Selection Criteria when reading the application. Your comments will be used for Applicant Feedback. It is important that the comments are a reflection of the rating you assigned to that criterion so the applicant can understand

Panel Coordinators will be able to complete the Applicant Feedback Summary form and Panel Coordinator Notes only after the IRF is in the final stage of development.

the score.

Although you may identify many strengths and weaknesses as you review each application, you are not expected to list each one – rather, the **significant** ones. It is important to keep in mind when reviewing the applications, what types of information you should NOT assess or comment on:



In completing your IRFs, if you are concerned that you did not understand something in the application, do not presume to know what the applicant meant to say or tried to say. Instead, assess the application based on what you did understand; anything that is unclear should be addressed during the Panel Discussion (or *noted as unclear* in the IRF comments).

4.3 Participating in Panel Discussions

After the individual reviews for a set of applications have been completed, the panels will convene by conference calls to discuss each application within that set. The purpose of the Panel Discussion is to share thoughts and discuss each Reviewer’s assessment of the application based on the Selection Criteria. While consensus is not a requirement of the Panel Discussion, Reviewers should strive to come to a general common understanding of the application quality. Reviewers are asked to engage in discussion about the Criteria and consider the assessments and findings of fellow panel members. The discussion should cover each of the relevant elements of the applicant’s application, and explore the points of agreement and disagreement among Reviewer IRFs.

After a Panel Discussion has been completed, each Reviewer revises and finalizes his/her IRF to reflect any changes to the original assessment. Through discussion, other panel members may provide you with information that changes your assessment of the proposal. This is the reason for the discussion and changing a rating based on a new perspective is perfectly valid. The Panel Coordinator will complete a Panel Coordinator Notes document for each application (based on the review for that application) and submit with the final Review Products at the conclusion of the review.

4.3.1 Tips for Productive Panel Discussions

During the Panel Discussion, all Reviewers and the Panel Coordinator will participate on the conference line. The average time for discussion is expected to be approximately 45 minutes per application. Panels will engage in discussion focused on the comments, assessments and ratings resulting from the individual reviews. The Panel Discussion should be well rounded and focused on a discussion of the quality of the application based on the Selection Criteria—the **discussion should not revolve solely around the areas where panel members provided differing ratings** for a section.

Reviewers may agree, disagree, clarify individual assessments and misunderstandings, and ask questions while collectively discussing an application. Based on these discussions, you may come to view aspects of the application differently than you did during the individual review. Preparedness, tact, patience and conscious participation are just some of the ways you can assist in the process of assessing applications, and in making your Panel Discussions meaningful.

Helpful Tips on How to be an Effective Panel Member

- #1: Review and be familiar with the Notice, the Selection Criteria, the Reviewer Rubric and other relevant documents.
- #2: Allow your Panel Coordinator to lead. Panel Coordinators have different styles and will assert themselves in different ways and at different times. Recognize the importance of the PC role and respect it.
- #3: Have both the application and your completed IRF in front of you for each discussion.
- #4: Ask others to explain or clarify their positions and be an active listener. Do not be afraid to ask questions.
- #5: Focus on the content of what is being said and not the person.
- #6: Participate actively in the discussion, using supporting evidence from the application for your points.
- #7: Be receptive to opposing viewpoints and put your emotions aside.
- #8: Answer other panel members' questions and challenges cordially and diplomatically.
- #9: Expect to return to your IRF and make revisions on several occasions before finalizing the review product.
- #10: Be on time.

4.4 Submitting Final IRFs



Final IRFs will need to be submitted both in Word format and in eGrants. This step should only happen as the absolute last step for submission. Instructions for proper documentation (naming conventions for final submission, and instructions for eGrants submission) will be provided in the second week of the review.

Before you can submit an IRF as final: each Reviewer should revisit your IRFs and make any appropriate amendments to your comments or ratings to reflect your conclusive assessment. Perform a quality check of the full IRF to eliminate Tracked Changes, recalculate the Total Score, ensure proper Ratings are selected, ensure that (+) and (-) are noted appropriately, verify the assessment does not contain comments that were accidentally copied from another IRF, ensure that this is the latest version, etc. The overall score from each Reviewer's IRF for an application will be averaged by CNCS to represent the overall panel score for that application.

4.5 Completing the Close Out Process

After all review materials are final, all Reviewers and Panel Coordinators will complete their individual close outs. Your close out is completed when the following has been completed by the panel:

Panel Coordinators will ensure that all IRFs are complete by: (in the following order)

(Consult the [Review Product Checklist on the Reviewer Resource Webpage](#))

- Confirming that Reviewers have submitted all required materials.
- Reviewing IRF for improper language
- Ensuring that all strengths and weaknesses are recorded properly (+) and (-)
- Ensuring Ratings are correctly added for a proper Overall Score on the IRF
- Submitting all Applicant Feedback Summary forms
- Submitting all Panel Coordinator Notes

- Labeling (according to the required naming convention) all final Review Products (IRFs, PCs, AFSs)
- Submitting all Review Products to your GARP Liaison
- Ensuring all final IRFs have been entered into eGrants
- Completing and submitted your School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Review Process Evaluation. You will receive a URL for the evaluation form after the review has ended.

CNCS will confirm that each Review Participant has satisfied the requirements of the review, as described in the Participation Agreement. Honoraria checks will be paid to each Review Participant electronically via direct deposit within 30 days after you receive confirmation from CNCS that you have satisfactorily completed all requirements stated in the Participation Agreement. Please consult the Participation Agreement and the information covered in the Orientation Sessions for conditions that may prevent you from receiving part or all of your honorarium payment.

Thank you for being a Review Participant in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Review!



5.0: Supplement for Panel Coordinators

All Panel Coordinators are responsible for reading the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Review Handbook and completing the required orientation sessions. It is also important to carefully read the Selection Criteria as laid out in the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (see Appendix B). Understanding these criteria is critical to being able to provide guidance to your panel members and to ensure that the Selection Criteria are adequately considered and discussed in the review. To be an effective Panel Coordinator, you must be knowledgeable not only about the School Turnaround AmeriCorps review process, but also about the Review Participants' role and activities. This section will outline the Panel Coordinator responsibilities on the panel.

5.1 Overview of the Panel Coordinator Role

The Panel Coordinator plays a key role in the successful implementation of the review, particularly with ensuring the timely delivery of quality review products to CNCS. Key aspects of the Panel Coordinator's role in the review process include:

- Managing the panel's activities in order to meet the review schedule
- Serving as the primary link between panel members and CNCS Staff
- Facilitating Panel Discussions and fostering a climate of respect within the panel
- Providing your panel with constructive and effective guidance in both the review process and the technical aspects of the review
- Ensuring Reviewers address the Selection Criteria in their IRFs and Panel Discussions adequately
 - Utilize the **Review Product Checklist** (provided on the Reviewer Resource Webpage) to ensure you are checking the IRFs appropriately.
- Providing timely and consistent feedback to Reviewers on the quality of their review forms
- Compiling the review results (comments, ratings) at varying times during the review to inform the panel and CNCS Staff of the review panel's progress
- Compiling the Applicant Feedback Summary form based on the comments from each Reviewer

Carefully read the Panel Coordinator Participation Agreement specifying the expectations of the Panel Coordinator role. If you have any questions, please email PeerReviewers@cns.gov. Emails to this address are received by GARP support staff and every effort is made to respond within one business day.

5.2 Preparing for the School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Grant Application Review

5.2.1 Panel Coordinator Timeline

The review process (including orientation sessions and other preliminary steps) spans 12 business days. Table 3 lists the dates for the important Panel Coordinator Check-Ins. For the detailed timeline, please see the **CNCS Reviewer Resource Webpage** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>)

Table 3: School Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Panel Coordinator Check-Ins

Date	Tasks
Wed, 5/1	Panel Coordinator Check-In 1 (1:00p.m. Eastern)
Tues, 5/7	Panel Coordinator Check-In 2 (1:00p.m. Eastern)
Mon, 5/13	Panel Coordinator Check-In 3 (1:00p.m. Eastern)

5.2.2 Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality

Panel Coordinators, like all our Reviewers, are subject to the confidentiality and conflict of interest considerations outlined in the Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement (COI Form). Each Review Participant must complete a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement (COI Form) for the applications they are assigned to review. This is found on the **CNCS Reviewer Resource Webpage** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>).

Because of the unique nature of the review process and the sensitivity of the information through the review, **CNCS determines the potential for both Direct (actual) and Indirect (perceived) conflicts of interest as defined below.**

- A direct conflict of interest – often through personal involvement, connection to, or benefit from an application submitted to CNCS
- An indirect conflict of interest – through various forms of affiliation, personally or professionally with an applicant institution

As soon as the applications assigned to your panel are available in eGrants, access and examine each of your assigned applications for potential conflicts. If you suspect a conflict or have a question, contact CNCS immediately and let the staff determine whether a conflict does indeed exist. If CNCS determines that there is a conflict, CNCS staff will provide you with appropriate guidance. Complete and submit the COI Statement in advance of the start of the review.

***Note:** this form should be completed whether you have or have not identified potential conflicts—as it represents your understanding of your responsibility regarding COIs, and Confidentiality, and your agreement to adhere to the guidelines in the instance that a COI circumstance arises.*

5.2.3 Panel Introduction Call

The Panel Coordinator’s role in the Panel Introduction Call is to organize and begin leading the panel to prepare for the review. **This call should take place within 24 hours of receiving your panel assignments!** It is important to contact your assigned Reviewers and create the review schedule as early as you can. You will be part of a panel of four total Review Participants with varying experience and levels of expertise. Once you have the contact information for the Review Participants on your panel, you should reach out to introduce yourself and initiate the planning process for the Panel Introduction Call and subsequent panel discussions. Suggested agenda topics for the Panel Introduction Call:

- Allow each Review Participant to give his/her background and level of experience with reviews
- Establish optimal means of communication for each Review Participant (e.g., preferred email address, phone number)
- Review the expectations and schedule, and work together to set the dates and times of the panel discussions
 - Encourage flexibility and a commitment to the review schedule and needs
 - Discuss and consider time zones for each person, and general “ideal times” for availability and responsiveness
- Ensure that everyone is reading the applications in the same order (any order is fine: alphabetically, as they appear in your panel assignment email, etc.)

5.3 Setting up your Panel for Success

5.3.1. Ensuring that Reviewers complete work on time

Setting up for success:

- Create group agreements that include completing the work on time.
 - Be sure all Reviewers voice their perspective in creating shared group agreements, expectations and schedule. If there are differing expectations, this is the best time to address the standard and expectations of CNCS, and you as a Panel coordinator.
- Monitor and check in with panel members via email.
 - Send out updates of information and reminders of milestones that the group agreed to. (“Remember, by the end of today, everyone should have read their first three applications and written at least one Individual Reviewer Form!”).
- As a group, create a realistic schedule for completion that attempts to consider everyone’s needs.
 - Remind the Reviewers to keep their Timetable handy, refer to it frequently.
- Remind Reviewers of time commitment and encourage them to set aside or otherwise minimize major distractions (e.g., postpone activities that can be done another time).
- Check in periodically to see if the agreed schedule is still realistic and achievable (and modify if needed).

Interventions:

- Remind group of agreed-upon schedule, emphasizing that the reasoning behind pacing themselves is to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed and ensuring that each application has received the fairest quality review from the panel.
- *Next step:* speak with each Reviewer individually to see how you can help him/her get work done on time. Give heads up to your GARP Liaison.
- *Final action:* remind each Reviewer that you will need to notify your GARP Liaison if the work is not done satisfactorily and entered in the electronic form by the deadline.

5.3.2 Ensuring that Individual Reviewer Forms are quality products

Setting up for success:

- Create group agreements that include preparing thoughtful and thorough IRFs (Refer to the *Example IRF*, and share the *Review Product Checklist*).
- Review the Selection Criteria by which each application should be evaluated.
- Acknowledge that “details” may be harder for some work styles than others but again, a certain level of detail is necessary for this review.

Interventions:

- Speak with the Reviewers individually and go through specific areas for improvement for the IRF.

5.3.3 Ensuring Review Participant responsiveness to phone calls and/or emails

Setting up for success:

- Talk with panels to establish a response time norm. (Example: all emails will be responded to within eight hours, including weekends.)
- Set precedent of asking Reviewers to “reply to confirm” they have received an email.
- Confirm contact lists in the beginning with agreements that they must be available:
 - Iterate that most communication will be via email and requires response
 - Confirm location of listed phone number (work/home/cell)
 - General hours of group availability (day and evening hours)

- Communicate single days, or hours that a Reviewer is not available
- Discuss time zones, and general conflicting obligations (should not be numerous or extensive)
- Respond promptly when contacted by Reviewers.

Interventions:

- If Reviewer is non-responsive to one means of contact, try an alternative format (e.g., if first contact was through email, try the phone).
- Contact GARP Liaison to give a heads up if a Reviewer has been non-responsive to attempts.

5.3.4 Ensuring that Reviewers have read the Notice and key documents

Setting up for success:

- Emphasize the need for familiarity with *the Notice* and related documents to effectively review the proposals.
- Revisit the roles and responsibilities and Selection Criteria by which each application should be evaluated.

Interventions:

- Speak with Reviewer of concern individually to see if he/she understands *the Notice*, potentially highlighting a comment that was made in contradiction with a *Notice Requirement*.
- If you sense difficulties that might benefit from this assistance, offer to review them together, etc.
- Final step: Contact GARP Liaison to notify them of the issue.

5.3.5 Creating equal “air” time for all Reviewers in the panel discussion

Setting up for success:

- Begin with discussion on the general aspects of the application, moving toward the specific aspects to encourage a structured objective discussion of the facts.
- Take note of how each Reviewer reacts to conflict or disagreements.
- Work to include the entire panel in the discussion for 100% participation.
- At the outset of each discussion remind the panel of the group agreements.
- Set the tone during the first discussion, communicating your facilitation style and the expectation for participation—calling on each Reviewer to state his/her opinions to set the precedent.
- Acknowledge and state that different work styles may participate differently but that all must have an equal opportunity and equal contribution to the discussion.

Interventions:

- Step in when group members are not able to keep each other engaged.
- Structure and lead discussion so that each Reviewer takes turn to state his/her comments on the application. Actively draw in any Reviewer who seems withdrawn and find out what they would like to contribute.
- Step in when group is not able to maintain balanced participation.
- Facilitate the conversation flow as needed (e.g., gently deflect a dominating person’s input by allowing others to speak).

5.3.6 Preventing difficult interactions among panel member(s) due to personality conflict (document this in the *Panel Coordinator Notes*)

Setting up for success:

- Address the application’s strengths or weaknesses more than the Reviewer’s opinions.
- Ask Reviewers to provide specific reference from application, to encourage objectivity.

- Keep the discussions moving. If a point of strong disagreement occurs, encourage productive discussion about the Selection Criteria. Then move to another point once the various assessments have been stated.

NOTE: Your responsibility is to the panel as a whole. If one panel member's needs are taking away from the panel as a whole, please seek help from your GARP Liaison or the Review Coordinator.

Interventions:

- Acknowledge the issue and provide guidance; remind panel to focus on what is in the proposal and the relevant points.
- Use humor, if appropriate, to break tension. Encourage humor from others.
- Talk with Reviewer privately and ask if something is bothering them – let him/her express it. Ask what the panel member would like to do about it.
- Remind the panel to do what is best for the sake of the applicant.

5.3.7 Preventing Review bias (you should document this in the *Panel Coordinator Notes*)

Setting up for success:

- Reiterate Reviewer roles and responsibilities, and remind each panel member about his/her responsibility to give each application a fair and objective review.

Interventions:

- Remind the group as a whole that there is that fine line between contributing their expertise and crossing into bias, so step back and ask them to see if the point they are making may be coming from a bias. Still value their perspective but let them decide.
- Ask Reviewers to provide evidence or elaboration to substantiate his/her point.
- Refer to the Rubric details, and the Selection Criteria when asking Review to reconsider the point.
- Use humor, when appropriate, to bring about awareness of bias.

5.3.8 Assisting Reviewers who appear to struggle with the technical or other requirements of the review

Setting up for success:

- Check in regularly with your panel members both as a group and individually.
- Monitor their progress in writing their IRFs.
- Ask: “How can I assist you?”

Interventions:

- Set up a time to work individually with that panel member.
- Contact your GARP Liaison.
- Remember that your responsibility is to the panel as a whole. If one panel member's needs are taking away from the panel as a whole, you need to seek help from CNCS Staff. Do not hesitate to ask CNCS Staff for individualized support for the panel member.

5.4 Coordinating your Panel

As the Panel Coordinator, you will monitor and guide the Reviewers to ensure engaging discussions that reflects the panel's assessment of each assigned application. Both points of agreement and disagreement should be considered in the Panel Discussion. All discussion should revolve around the requirements of the Selection Criteria

Reaching consensus or agreement on comments and ratings in the application is not the purpose of the Panel Discussion. Reviewers should discuss their ratings and assessments in full consideration of other opinions and experience levels without the pressure of aligning their results. Based on the discussion, Reviewers will need to return to their IRFs to revise (if necessary) and finalize their assessments to reflect their final opinion.

The entire Review will be conducted remotely using a Field Review model. Several aspects of the Field Review model can make the Panel Coordinator's role somewhat challenging:

- The overlap of review tasks in a condensed timeframe
- The absence of face-to-face interaction for communication and discussions
- The necessity to discuss among all panel members for a common goal
- Coordinating schedules of all panel members (including the Panel Coordinator) to performing review functions while also carrying on their lives (in different time zones)

5.4.1 Interacting with the Program Officer Liaison

The Program Officer Liaison is your resource for programmatic (School Turnaround AmeriCorps specific) inquiries. You can also expect that Panel Coordinators will have a brief conversation or check in with your panel before you begin the Panel Discussions to answer any questions that panelists may have about how to apply the Selection Criteria or about a concern identified in an application. **Throughout the review, the Program Officer Liaisons will be reviewing the IRFs and the Applicant feedback Summary forms that your panels produce. You will receive feedback on at least one of each form. Utilize the Review Product Checklist to ensure that you address all of the items in these forms that are the PC responsibility.**

You are encouraged to initiate or request a meeting with your POL (with your panel, or with you on your panel's behalf) if you are receiving multiple questions from the panelists about particular criteria, or the same application. You can also expect that a POL may proactively check in with you during the actual review.

Be sure that all of your correspondence with your POL takes place through the AmeriCorpsPOL@cns.gov email address. **You must include your Panel# in the Subject line, and CC your GARP Liaison.**

5.4.2 Facilitating the Panel Discussion

The panel discussions should revolve around the Selection Criteria; utilize the IRF and other guidance as needed to keep panel members focused on the appropriate elements and weights. It is important to constructively communicate your observations and expectations, while encouraging your panel members to do the same. The expectation is a smooth, timely and organized process that results in a fair, objective and quality assessment of applicants' proposals. Reviewers may agree, disagree, clarify individual assessments and misunderstandings, and ask questions while collectively discussing an application. Reviewers may have the same rating for applications, but different rationale for their ratings, and/or Reviewers may take note of the same issues but apply or weigh them differently. Therefore, it is important to encourage discussion among panel members to ensure application strengths and weaknesses are viewed considering the same criteria. The diverse level of panel members' expertise and backgrounds will lend itself to valuable panel discussions. However, it is important to keep in mind that the discussion should extend beyond *areas of disagreement* or *differing ratings*.

CNCS does not provide specific requirements for the panel discussions, and the following are offered only as suggestions (see the Appendices for *Panel Coordinator Tips for Panel Introduction Calls* for additional information on questions and guiding discussions):

You may utilize online scheduling tools (such as Doodle, ScheduleOnce, etc. according to your panel’s preference) to coordinate schedules for arranging the calls.

Provide an agenda prior to the call and begin the call by reviewing the agenda to ensure everyone has the same expectations.

Begin the discussion of the application by providing a summary of the proposed project.

Identify a specific order for each Review Participant to summarize his/her individual evaluation.

Specify set time limits for each Review Participant and/or each application.

Facilitating panel discussions from a distance, via telephone, has some unique challenges. Some of these challenges include: background noise (or conversely, muted phones, and sparse participation), competing distractions (driving, multi-tasking, or other persons nearby); not being able to observe body language, technology barriers, and possible confusion about scheduled times due to time zone differences. You will need to pay close attention to human dynamics and signals from your panel members to facilitate effectively, and be extra rigorous in ensuring that panel communications are clear and understood by all.

Table 4: Panel Coordinator Challenges and Possible Solutions

Challenge	Possible Solutions
Starting calls on time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send email reminders in advance of call. Panelists should have a call-in number, application(s) being discussed, and relevant notes from the Panel Coordinator available before the call start time.
Panel members speaking over each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach agreement on how panel members will be recognized to speak. If a particular Reviewer is especially experiencing this problem, a private conversation may be in order.
Not having a visual that everyone can see (e.g., an evolving list of significant strengths and weaknesses for the application)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest that everyone is at a computer or has printed documents on hand during discussion. Repeat/restate a comment made to be sure everyone is discussing the same topic. Make specific page/paragraph/topic references for each application (“for the Kansas app, at the bottom of page 5 ...”).
One Reviewer is especially quiet during a call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly engage the Reviewer by asking what he/she thinks about the point being discussed.

5.4.3 Providing Feedback on Individual Reviewer Form

Two primary aspects of the Panel Coordinator’s role are to monitor Reviewers’ progress and to guide Reviewers to produce high-quality IRFs by the established deadlines. The IRFs document a Reviewer’s assessment of an application and serve as the foundation for the review results (provided to CNCS Staff and later to applicants as feedback). Often, there is a direct correlation between the quality of the IRFs and the roadblocks encountered in completing the remainder of the review process for the panel as a whole. As Reviewers begin completing their IRFs, you are asked to review and provide constructive feedback on their IRFs.

Your primary focus in reviewing and providing feedback on IRFs is to ensure that Reviewers:

- Include comments that reflect the *significant* strengths and weaknesses of an application
- Only use comments that address the Selection Criteria
- Select ratings that are supported by the significant strengths and weaknesses

- Are consistent with the CNCS standards of quality and completion

You are not expected to make edits to the IRFs, but to provide specific comments and constructive feedback on what improvements are needed; the most important task is to help Reviewers understand the IRF and what is expected in the level of quality. Reference the Example Individual Review Form for an example of how you can provide feedback to an IRF. As a general rule, we expect that you will review each IRF only once. The Reviewer will apply your feedback to subsequent IRFs, and subsequent IRFs should require less-intensive feedback. **You can share the Review Product Checklist with Reviewers so that they are aware of the items that you and the POL will be reviewing in the IRFs.**

If a panel member is not completing his/her reviews as scheduled, you should contact that Reviewer to understand what the problems are, and to ensure that he/she can get back on schedule. If this issue recurs, the GARP Liaison should be made aware of the efforts and the possible lack of compliance from that Reviewer. This proactive guidance will prevent major challenges for everyone (especially the panel) as the review advances.

Reviewers will complete the draft IRFs and email to Panel Coordinator. Read the draft IRF provide your feedback to the Reviewer via email—if needed, you can add a follow up by phone.

5.4.4 Completing the Applicant Feedback Summary (AFS) Form

The AFS serves to document the substance of a panel's assessment for an application. The form is designed to provide the applicant with a summary of feedback on their application. As the Panel Coordinator you should not adjust or rewrite the comments from Reviewers. Rather, you should COPY and PASTE the most relevant comments from each Reviewer's IRF. You should not COPY all of the comments from every form. Additional guidance is below, emphasized on the Review Product Checklist and on the AFS as well.

For each application you review, your AFS comments will:

- Provide the applicant with a logical synopsis of how panel members viewed its application.
- Represent a reasonable alignment with the overall panel score average
- Reflect differing viewpoints on a particular criterion that Reviewers had.
- Capture your summary assessment of the application's significant strengths and weaknesses (not every noted strength and weakness should be included in the Applicant Feedback section)
- Provide a basis for the Ratings that you assign to the application's selection criteria
- Provide to CNCS Staff and the applicants with useful feedback about each application
- Contain comments that were copied from IRFs, and were **not** otherwise changed or manipulated.

As with IRFs, AFS should not contain any direct suggestions or recommendations for improvement, and should only address the quality of the information that was in the application (as required by the Selection Criteria).

Additionally, the summary comments for applicant feedback should come solely from a sampling of the comments from the IRFs—the feedback must focus on the most relevant comments from the IRF—the Strengths and Weaknesses that had the greatest impact on the selected Rating. It should not be new information or comments that did not respond to the Selection Criteria.

Once an AFS has been completed, please send to your GARP Liaison for documentation and review from the POL. This should happen on a rolling basis, as they are available.

**Thank you for being a Panel Coordinator in the School
Turnaround AmeriCorps FY13 Review!**



Appendix A – Glossary of Terms

AmeriCorps

On the whole, a network of 3 programs; AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), and AmeriCorps State and National which support nearly 75,000 Americans in service to meet critical needs in the six priority Focus Areas of: Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families; as well as Capacity Building. For the purpose of this grant review, all AmeriCorps references pertain to the AmeriCorps State and National program.

Bias

Bias is a preference or inclination that may inhibit impartial judgment or objectivity. One's bias is not limited to a negative judgment, or dislike of an application, and is more often found in favor, or an unfounded positive preference of an applicant or an aspect of an application. We ask that all Review Participants remain vigilant in Panel Discussions to ensure that bias is not introduced in the assessments.

Blended Review Process

The Blended Review Process is a review process to assess applications, which includes the involvement of reviewers both externally recruited and who are staff from CNCS, and in this case, ED. All Reviewers conduct individual reviews and participate in review discussions for each eligible application. Based on the results from the Review, an Internal Staff Review is conducted for applications that meet the criteria to advance in the review process .

Conflicts of Interest (COI)

A conflict of interest is a situation in which conflict exists between one's private interest and official responsibilities. Such competing interests can make it difficult for a Reviewer to fulfill his/her duties impartially. CNCS considers both actual and perceived COIs in the interest of fairness to applicants, and preserving the integrity of the review process.

Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS)

A Federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through programs like Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and the Social Innovation Fund, and leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For the purpose of this review, CNCS is the agency that is responsible for the respective grant competition.

eGrants

The CNCS web-based online grants management system for all grant-related administration. Reviewers will use eGrants for ¹downloading applications, ²entering their respective banking information in order to receive the honorarium, and ³entering the final results from the IRF to document their assessment.

Grant Review Application Process (GARP) Liaison

Primary contact for process-related guidance and logistical support. For the purpose of this review, the GARP Liaison is essentially your personal review assistant that will contact you to ensure that you are connected, responsive, and prepared with all of the proper resources to complete the review.

Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)

The form that is designed to document a Reviewer's assessment through ratings and comments (that identified strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Selection Criteria) for an application. The IRF is the primary (and most important) review product and deliverable, as several other aspects and products depend on the quality of this document.

Mid-Review Quality Control (MRQC)

The process that occurs during the review to ensure that there is a high-quality assessment, discussion and full consideration of the Selection Criteria applied to the review of each application. The need for MRQC is determined by the distance between the highest and lowest total scores among Reviewers of an application on each panel. When an application is recommended for MRQC, the panel is asked to return to discussion and revise their IRFs to reflect any modifications in their assessment resulting from that additional discussion.

Post-Review Quality Control (PRQC)

The review process that occurs after the Blended Review has concluded to reassess applications that were subject to panel anomalies: wide range in scores, issues with Reviewer bias, etc. This process is designed to ensure that each application receives a fair review and is not disadvantaged from any issues that panels may have experienced. PRQC Reviewers are selected from the original Review Participants that had good performance results and high-quality IRFs; to review a separate set of applications.

Reviewer

Evaluates the grant applications according to the Selection Criteria, and completes an Individual Reviewer Form for each application. There are typically 3-5 Reviewers on each panel. An External Reviewer is an individual with the appropriate expertise from the public who was recruited to participate. Staff Reviewers, Internal Reviewers or Federal Reviewers reference individuals who are employees of CNCS, or in this case, also ED.

Review Participant

General reference that refers to BOTH Panel Coordinators, and Reviewers (both External and Federal)—any person that is participating in the review.

Review Rubric

The document that provides the metrics for how each Criterion should be rated. The available ratings are: Excellent, Above Average, Average, Below Average, and Poor—and each selected rating should align with the comments that are provided for a particular section in the IRF.

Panel Coordinator (PC)

The panel manager that implements the schedule and other panel logistics throughout the review, remains objective and impartial, facilitates the Panel Discussions between Reviewers, and ensures that Reviewers produce high-quality IRFs. The PC serves as the primary liaison between panel members and CNCS Staff Liaisons regarding the issues and progress of the panel. Aside from reviewing the IRFs, the PC completes two work products: the Panel Coordinator Notes, and the Applicant Feedback Summary form.

Program Officer Liaison (POL)

Provides CNCS programmatic expertise and guidance.

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Initiative

The School Turnaround AmeriCorps initiative is a collaborative effort by the CNCS and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to increase educational achievement, high school graduation rates, and college readiness for students in our nation’s lowest-performing elementary, middle, and high schools.

Appendix B: Online Resources

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Notice of Funding Opportunity

http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/schoolturnaround_ac_notice.pdf

School Turnaround AmeriCorps Application Instructions

http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/schoolturnaround_ac_app_instructions.pdf

CNCS Homepage

www.nationalservice.gov.

CNCS Reviewer Resource Webpage

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/schoolpeerreview/instructions.asp>

eGrants

<https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp>

Appendix C: Writing Meaningful Comments (for Reviewers)

Standards for a High-Quality Individual Review Form (IRF)

The comments from the IRF will serve as the basis for the panel discussion and the documentation for the assessment of the application, and will be provided to the applicant as feedback from the peer review process. The comments may also be released to the public in response to official Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The completeness and quality of these comments, as well as the alignment between the Ratings and comments, are extremely important. They must be appropriate, useful, and clearly correspond with the Selection Criteria that Reviewers are assessing. Provided below is guidance on *writing meaningful comments*.

Writing Meaningful Comments

- **Base the assessment only on the information provided in the reviewed application.** Do not include information from outside sources or about the applicant's known reputation. Also refrain from comparing one application to another.
- **Present evaluative language instead of a summary of details from the application.** Provide specific feedback about the application, such as an assessment of the application's strengths and weaknesses or how well the applicant addressed the requirements with the information they provided.
- **Phrase deficiencies in the application appropriately.** Avoid making suggestions for improvement and resist the urge to tell the applicant what would have made the proposal better. Instead, tell the applicant what was lacking and how this omission affected the proposal.
- **Do not use inflammatory or inappropriate statements.** Exercise care when drafting an assessment. Do not leave questions in the comments, and avoid harsh tones, exclamation points, and/or overly broad statements. Do not refer to the "grant writer", "the panel", or any other perspective. All references should be made in reference to "the applicant" (beneficiaries, Members, etc.) for the application, etc.

Examples of inflammatory or inappropriate language:

Why did the applicant not respond to the majority of the Criteria?

In my opinion, the evidence was very strong and substantiated their claims,

The evidence in support of the identified need was virtually non-existent.

The applicant never clearly stated who the target population was, don't know how this made it to peer review!

The grant writer was slick and creative, but there was little substance to the proposal.

- **Write in complete sentences and use correct grammar and spelling.** Use spell check and reread the assessment after it has been completed. Be sure that it is clear and well-written.
- **Only use comments to address the School Turnaround AmeriCorps Selection Criteria; do not comment on other random or irrelevant aspects of the proposal.**
- **Limit comments to the strengths and weaknesses of the application, and utilize the indicators (+) (-) before each statement for clarity.** Take care to ensure that the strengths and

weaknesses do not contradict each other. If there are strong and weak aspects of a Criterion, phrase the comments appropriately.

*i.e. **INCORRECT:** (+/-) While the applicant proposed a comprehensive activity to engage AmeriCorps Members and create a positive service experience, the proposed leader of these activities was one of the AmeriCorps members, instead of a qualified instructor or motivational figure.*

***CORRECT:** (+) The applicant proposed a comprehensive activity to engage AmeriCorps Members and create a positive service experience.*

(-) The proposed leader of the activities for a positive service experience was one of the AmeriCorps members, instead of a qualified instructor or motivational figure.

- **Align the selected Rating with the comments provided for each section.**
- **Include one “return” between different comments.** Do not jumble all comments together in a single paragraph.

Characteristics of High Quality Comments

- Quantity does not equal quality. There is not a prescribed number of comments that are required for each section. The comments should be significant strengths or weaknesses, and address the Selection Criteria. There is also no prescribed length of a comment. Often, brevity lends more to clarity than lengthy comments.
- Keep comments focused on significant strengths and weaknesses (i.e. strengths and weaknesses that have an impact on the selected Rating).
 - Significant Strength or Weakness: An identified Strength or Weakness that **has an effect on the overall quality of the applicant’s response to the Criteria.** A significant Strength or Weakness often shows that the applicant has an understanding (or lack) of, a key issue in program implementation or management.
- Keep clear the difference between comments based on fact and those based on professional judgment (both are helpful, but the distinction is necessary).
- Comments should include evidence or an evaluation, rather than a reiteration or summary of what is in the application.

Characteristics of Low Quality Comments

- There is little or no relevant information to connect the statement to a particular application. The comment is generic and can be read to apply to any application.
- Comment includes a large portion of information that was copied directly from the application.
- There is little or no relevant information to indicate overall quality of the section.
- The sentence is long and confusing, so that the assessment is altogether unclear.
- There is little documentation or no evidence provided about what was strong/weak, or how it was good/bad.
- Comments are ambiguous and not clearly related to the Selection Criteria.
- Comments contain judgments that are outside the scope of responsibility of the Reviewer (i.e., commenting that the program has received more than its fair share of funding).
- Comments contain questions, page numbers, suggestions or recommendations for improvements. (these are discouraged, as it is often difficult for Reviewers to capture constructive, evaluative comments when these formats are used.)
- Comments are facetious, pejorative, or otherwise inappropriate or unprofessional.