

Guidance for New AmeriCorps National Grantees 2007/2008 Program Year



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Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

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Part 1: Introduction

Overview of AmeriCorps* National

AmeriCorps*National programs are funded directly from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to recruit, train and place AmeriCorps members to address unmet community needs. These programs are awarded funds through National Direct (including Professional Corps and Planning), Education Award Programs (EAP), or Indian Tribes grant competitions.

- **National Direct Programs** address community needs in at least two states. The grantee organization is responsible for the implementation and oversight of local programs in different states. The maximum cost per MSY is \$12,600.
- **Professional Corps Programs** recruit and place qualified participants in positions as teachers, nurses and other health care providers, police officers, engineers, or other professionals providing service to meet educational, public safety, human, or environmental needs in communities with an inadequate number of such professionals. The Programs operate in more than one state and follow the requirements of National Direct grants. The maximum cost per MSY is \$2,500.
- **National Planning Grants** are awarded up to \$50,000 for a one year period to develop a multi-state National Direct program that would be submitted in a subsequent grant competition.
- **Education Award Programs (EAP)** receive minimal financial support (\$600 per MSY) from the Corporation and have fewer fiscal reporting requirements. Higher Educational Institutions may operate an EAP in one state. Other EAP organizations must operate multi-state programs.
- **Indian Tribe Programs** are AmeriCorps programs operated by Indian Tribes. These programs follow the same requirements as National Direct Programs, but may operate in one state.

Other AmeriCorps programs are awarded through Governor-appointed State Service Commissions, which are supported through AmeriCorps*State grant competitions.

CNCS Staff Roles

Your grant has been assigned to a Deputy Director, Program Officer, a Grants Officer, Trust Officer, and Training Officer who you contact regarding issues related to the management and implementation of your AmeriCorps program. By now you have already been in communication with your program officer who will soon connect you with the other members of the team.

- **Deputy Director:** Lois Nembhard, Deputy Director for AmeriCorps* State and National, is directly responsible for the AmeriCorps*National grant programs. Please feel free to provide Lois with your feedback, concerns, or suggestions. She can be reached at lnembhard@cns.gov or by phone at 202-606-6827.
- **Program Officers (POs):** Your program officer is your primary point of contact with the Corporation. He/she will support you in the implementation of your program, and assist in resolving issues that arise concerning your grant. Program officers review progress reports and monitor programs for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. Program officers work closely with other units at CNCS to provide quality support to programs and will assist you in connecting to other personnel at the Corporation as necessary. As a new program,

you should be in regular contact with your program officer. Many programs find it to be very helpful to set up regular check-in calls with their program officer during the start-up period.

- **Grants Officers:** Grants Officers work in the Office of Grants Management (OGM) and are responsible for budget-related issues concerning your grant. Your program officer will provide you with the name and contact information for your grants officer. Grants officers review your Financial Status Reports (FSRs) and monitor financial management systems for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. Please copy your program officer on correspondence sent to grants officers so that they can help follow up.
- **Trust Officers:** Trust Officers work in the National Service Trust, which administers the Education Award that AmeriCorps members receive. Your program officer will provide you with the name and contact information for your trust officer. Trust Officers are the primary contacts for issues related to the Education Award, such as forbearance, education award, interest payments, etc. Please copy your program officer on correspondence sent to trust officers so that they can follow up.
- **Training Officers:** Training Officers work in the Office of Leadership Development and Training (OLDT) and oversee a network of training and technical assistance (TTA) providers. Gina Fulbright-Powell is the training officer liaison to AmeriCorps*National and the CNCS program staff communicate frequently with her to ensure that your TTA needs are addressed.

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

Part 2: Grant Negotiation and Award Process

Grant Negotiation is the process of working with your program officer and grants officer to resolve any issues that were identified during the review of your application.

Your PO will provide you with a negotiation letter that lists the aspects of your proposed program that need to be clarified or revised. You will respond to these “negotiation items” via eGrants and resubmit your application to the Corporation. Your program officer will explain this process and will clarify the contents of the negotiation letter in a negotiation call. You will be asked to designate someone from your organization to be the primary point of contact who will be able to devote time to resolving the identified issues, and to program start-up, which can be a time-consuming process.

Timeline for Negotiations

The negotiation period begins once an organization has been notified that it has been approved for negotiation of a grant award and lasts until the grant has been awarded. The length of the negotiations depends on the complexity of the issues there are to resolve and how quickly you are able to provide your responses. You will not be able to access grant funds or enroll members until the grant’s start date. It is a good idea to keep your sites and other stakeholders informed on the timeframe for negotiations and the start-up process.

Member Enrollment Periods

Members may be enrolled by your program only during the Member Enrollment Period, which will be determined as part of negotiations and will be specified on your Notice of Grant Award. The member enrollment period must be within the project period dates but they could differ. For example, some new programs find it helpful to begin the member enrollment period a month or two after the project period begins so that they may access grant funds to develop start-up materials and systems for operation prior to enrolling members. Your program officer can help you understand your options.

New programs often incorrectly assume that members must complete service by the end date of the member enrollment period; however, programs may continue to enroll members for the program year until the last day of the member enrollment period, and once enrolled, each member has a maximum of one year to complete service¹. Program design should determine whether your program establishes a set member enrollment deadline or a rolling enrollment process. Regardless, enrollment must be completed within 30 days of each member's start date. Members must be exited within 30 days of the member's last day of service². Please remember these requirements as you outline responsibilities with your sites in your site agreements.

Financial Management Survey

If you are a new CNCS grantee, you are required to complete a Financial Management Survey Form (FMS). The FMS assists us in assessing your organization's capacity to manage federal funds and determining if technical assistance is needed. The Office of Grants Management will send you an email regarding the completion and submission of the FMS and two additional forms described in the following section. Return these forms to your grants officer via traceable carrier (Fed Ex, UPS, etc.)³ as soon as possible so that the processing of these forms will not delay your grant award.

Your grant will not be awarded until negotiation items are resolved to the satisfaction of your program and grants officers, and until all required forms are submitted, including the FMS and two forms described below. Grant funds are available to you after your grant has been awarded, beginning on the project period start date.

Payment Management System

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

All programs must complete a quarterly report (a Federal Cash Transaction Report, called the SF-272) on the funds that have been received through the HHS Payment Management System. This form is submitted online to HHS via the HHS Payment Management System.

For assistance with accessing funds through the HHS Payment Management System or submitting the Federal Cash Transaction Report, please visit: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/walker/FinancialReporting_Fin.ppt . If you have questions about the HHS Payment Management System, please contact your grants officer.

¹ A member's term of service may be extended if a compelling personal circumstance justifies a suspension and the program completed a change of status form via WBRS.

² See the General AmeriCorps Provisions AC IV C.1 and AC IV. N. 2 and EAP Provisions AC IV C.1 and AC IV F.2

³ Please note that all mail sent via the US Postal Service to CNCS will be irradiated, which can delay receipt by several weeks. If you want CNCS to receive information quickly please send it via an alternative service.

Pre-Award Costs

The Office of Grants Management will consider requests in writing for permission to begin to accrue allowable costs that can be charged to the grant after the grant has been issued. These pre-award costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the grant award. Approval of the grant award remains contingent upon the resolution of all programmatic and budgetary issues. Approval of pre-award costs does not authorize a grantee or sub-grantee to have AmeriCorps members begin serving. AmeriCorps members may only begin service after a grant award has been issued and may not count any hours served prior to the award being issued as part of their term of service. All pre-award costs are incurred at the organizations' own risk. The Corporation is under no obligation to reimburse for pre-award costs if the organization does not receive an award or if the award is less than anticipated and inadequate to cover such costs.

Part 3: Support

You are not alone. In addition to CNCS staff, you will have access to training and technical assistance providers (the Corporation's network of subject-matter experts who offer training and technical assistance to CNCS grantees) and peers who are available to provide support. CNCS has also developed publications and online resources to assist you.

To support you in the start-up and on-going implementation of your AmeriCorps program, many resources will be at your disposal. Your primary resource is your program officer, but in addition there are numerous other options at your disposal, which your program officer will help you to navigate. These include a roster of training and technical assistance providers with a range of expertise, which are paid for by the Corporation; training institutes and conferences; and conference calls and webinars (web-based conference calls).

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

Training and Technical (T&TA) Assistance Plan for New AmeriCorps*National Programs

Our support plan for new programs is comprehensive and designed to be tailored to the unique needs of each program. Following are the options you and your program officer will select from in designing your individual training and technical assistance plan for the first year of your program.

- **Program Development Coach** – This individual will assist you in fine-tuning your program design, as necessary, and in developing the programmatic systems to support your program. He/she will work in collaboration with your program officer.
- **Performance Measurement Coach** – This individual will be assigned to you from Project STAR, the Corporation's performance measurement and evaluation T&TA provider. Your performance measurement coach will assist you in developing your performance measurement plan, revising your performance measures and identifying the appropriate tools to measure your performance.
- **Peer Mentor** – Peer mentors are experienced AmeriCorps National program directors who agree to serve as a resource for their new colleagues. The mentors and mentees are matched based on similarities in program model, program design or program focus. Mentors share lessons learned and best practices, offer tips for program development, and serve as a sounding board as you go through the first year of program implementation. If you would like a peer mentor, your program officer will send you an application, which we will use to select a mentor that is a good fit for your program.

- **Financial Management Assistance** – Walker and Company, the Corporation’s financial management T&TA provider, assists new grantees in developing and implementing solid financial management systems to support their AmeriCorps programs. This is particularly important for grantees who have no or minimal federal grants management experience.
- **Program Start-up Institute** – Modeled after the publication, “**Building a High Quality AmeriCorps Program: From Blueprint to Implementation: New Program Start-up Guide,**”⁴ this institute helps new programs develop the infrastructure needed to support a strong AmeriCorps program. We encourage all new programs to attend this institute. This year’s institute will take place October 10-12, 2007 in Memphis, TN.

Other Training and Technical Assistance

- **Topical Conference Calls and Webinars** – A variety of calls and webinars are held throughout the year on topics of interest to AmeriCorps programs. The list of topics is developed by program staff based on its assessment of grantee needs and requests from grantees. Topics might include member recruitment, common audit findings, the Web-Based Reporting System (WBRS), days of service, overview of the National Service Trust to name just a few.
- **Training Institutes** – In addition to the Program Start-Up Institute, there are two other annual institutes:
 - **Resource and Fund Development Institute** – This training institute is designed to provide national service grantees with opportunities to hone skills and apply knowledge to rapidly install the mechanisms to raise funds.
 - **Financial Management Institute** – This institute helps national service grantees gain financial management knowledge in such areas as OMB circulars, proper documentation, fiscal reporting requirements, utilizing the HHS system, AmeriCorps match requirements, and more.
- **Conferences**
 - **National Conference on Service and Volunteering** - Convened by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Points of Light Foundation, the National Conference on Volunteering and Service is the largest annual gathering of volunteer leaders in the United States. The program offers an AmeriCorps workshop track as well as opportunities to network with other national service programs and get updates on CNCS policies.
 - **Best Practices Conference** – Offered every two years, this conference is an opportunity to learn from other AmeriCorps National program directors and share your program’s best practices. The next conference will take place in 2009.
 - **National Conference on Service in Indian Communities** – This conference is designed to unite and reinforce Tribes, Service Programs, and Partners in their work to strengthen communities. The conference increases opportunities for Indian tribes to work together, identifies potential resources and partners, and builds on service and service learning activities to make communities stronger. This year, the conference will take place October 30 to November 2, 2007 in Sparks, NV
- **Training and Technical Assistance Providers** - T&TA providers are organizations competitively selected by the Corporation to provide tools, training, and information on a variety of topics to grantees. For information on the providers, please visit: <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/tta/index.php>. Your program

⁴ A description and access information for this publication is available later in the support section of this document.

officer will work with you to determine what your needs are and make requests on your behalf for the services of T&TA providers.

AmeriCorps National grantees are most likely to work with the following providers:

- **Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL):** NWREL provides field-vetted practices and resources in the areas of member recruitment (including outreach), placement, orientation and pre-service training, ongoing member training, and assisting members with transition beyond their year of service Member Recruitment. Its website, EnCorps - <http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/>, includes valuable resources for member recruitment and member support.
- **Project STAR:** Provides national service grantees with group training and individual assistance with performance measures, developing performance measurement instruments, planning and carrying out data collection, analyzing data, incorporating performance measurement results into reports and working effectively with internal/external evaluator(s). Its website - http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online_pubs/perf_meas/ac_home.php - includes many useful tools.
- **Walker & Company:** Ensures that directors of national service programs develop the skills needed to effectively administer and manage federal funds. Training emphasis is on financial oversight requirements for state and national grantees and sub-grantees.
- **ACKCO:** Provides technical assistance to tribal programs to develop organizational and managerial capacity of Corporation-funded programs that serve tribal communities.
- **Campaign Consultation, Inc.:** Provides resource and fund development training and technical assistance to national service grantees through 2-day institutes, training workshops, online resources and one-on-one coaching.

Peer Support - AmeriCorps*National encourages grantees to network with one another for peer support. In addition to the peer mentor program mentioned previously, we offer affinity groups, listservs, and other opportunities for cross-program sharing and learning.

- **Affinity Groups** - Affinity Groups are comprised of grantee organizations that share common experiences, challenges or goals. They serve as a source of support for participants, and can help participants to work towards and achieve goals. These groups meet by phone according to a calendar determined by each group's participants. Some of the groups also meet in person at national service conferences or participate in peer-exchanges. Your program officer will describe the active affinity groups to help you decide whether you would like to join one or more of these groups.
- **Listservs** - We encourage all AmeriCorps National program directors to subscribe to the AmeriCorps National listserv (ACNational). This listserv is a tool for AmeriCorps National program directors to exchange information, gather advice related to common issues and challenges, advertise program successes, seek peer advice, and develop AmeriCorps National affinity. To register, just send a blank email to: join-acnational@lists.etr.org and you will be automatically registered for the listserv.
- You may choose to also subscribe to other National Service listservs, such as the general AmeriCorps listserv (ACList). Please visit <http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/listservs/index.php#acnational> for descriptions of listservs and subscription information. Because ACList generates a significant amount of email, you might want to choose the digest option.

Online Publications

We highly recommend that you utilize two publications during the start-up period to help you develop strong systems that will support your program. Please bookmark and download these resources and refer to them often. These publications are available through the National Service

Resource Center (www.nationalserviceresources.org) along with online resources, print publications, training opportunities, and other helpful resources.

- **Building a High Quality AmeriCorps Program: *From Blueprint to Implementation: New Program Start-up Guide***
The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) has produced an in-depth guide to help prospective AmeriCorps program applicants, start-up programs lacking AmeriCorps experience, existing AmeriCorps programs, and new AmeriCorps staff to understand the multiple facets of a successful AmeriCorps program. To access the Guide, please see:
[Building a High Quality AmeriCorps Program](http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online_pubs/ameri-corps/startup_guide.php) (Complete PDF, 13MB)
(http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online_pubs/ameri-corps/startup_guide.php)
- **The Insider's Guide to AmeriCorps Program Management**
This manual was created "by the field, for the field," drawing on a wide spectrum of expertise of AmeriCorps State and National program directors. It is a resource guide to help program directors establish and maintain sound programs that operate in compliance with federal and state statutes, regulations, provisions, and policies.
[The Insider's Guide to AmeriCorps Program Management](http://nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/TASC/insiders_mar_06.doc) (DOC, 1.4MB)
(http://nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/TASC/insiders_mar_06.doc)

Part 4: Rules and Regulations

Please spend a significant amount of time during the start-up period becoming familiar with the rules and regulations of your AmeriCorps grant. This point cannot be emphasized enough. There are AmeriCorps-specific rules, state laws, and financial and management requirements.

AmeriCorps-Specific Rules:

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

AmeriCorps requirements are statutory, regulatory, or provisional.

- **Statutory Requirements** are those set by Congress as outlined in The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which together authorize the federally funded initiative of AmeriCorps.
- **The Regulations** are Corporation for National and Community Service's interpretations of the statute and set out the agency's purpose and powers, and the circumstances of applying the statute. Regulations are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The AmeriCorps regulations can be found in Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 25, beginning with section 2520.10. Citations for Regulations are written like this: 45 C.F.R. §2522.230 or abbreviated as § 2522.230.
- **AmeriCorps Provisions** provide supplemental detail to the Regulations. The *Education Award Program Provisions* are for EAPs and the *General AmeriCorps Provisions* are for all other AmeriCorps grant programs. New Provisions are issued each year. Citations for Provisions are written like this: [AC I. B.2]

Please bookmark the Provisions and Regulations on your computer. These are accessible via the “Manage Current Grants” section of the AmeriCorps website. Please see and review often: http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp.

The online versions for many of these documents are searchable by topic, which makes it much easier to access information on a specific issue.

Also accessible on the right column of the above link is the “Communications Center” for AmeriCorps State and National grantees. Communications sent to you by the director and deputy director, including policy updates and other critical information will be posted here for your reference.

The Regulations and Provisions are your primary sources of information in the day-to-day management of your grant, and your PO will assist you in becoming familiar with them.

Other Requirements

- **State Laws:** AmeriCorps programs must become aware of the laws of all of the states in which their members serve. For example, you should find out about the state laws pertaining to taxes, workers compensation, background checks, etc. If you need assistance accessing this information, State Service Commissions can be a helpful resource. Contact information for the Commissions can be found at: <http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/statecommission.asp>
- **OMB Circulars:** OMB Circulars are issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and outline administrative requirements and cost principles for non-profit organizations, state and local governments, and educational institutions using federal funds. Understanding the applicable OMB Circulars is critical to operating a compliant federal grant. Please see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/index.html>. As fixed grants, EAPs are not required to follow Cost-Principal requirements in the OMB Circulars.

Part 5: Program Start-Up Considerations

As you read the Regulations and Provisions you will see that there are many systems that you will need to develop in order to manage a program that is in compliance with the requirements. This section will highlight some of the systems or aspects of program management you should develop during the start-up period. These are:

Financial Management, Written Policies and Procedures, Site Management, Training and Technical Assistance, Member Management, Performance Management, and Corporation Electronic Data Management Systems. These are certainly not the only aspects of program development you will need to consider and develop during start-up. Please discuss others with your program officer.

Financial Management Systems

Under CNCS regulations, grantees⁵ must maintain financial management systems that provide accurate, complete, and current disclosure of AmeriCorps grant finances.

Components of a financial management system include:

- Adequate practices that address regulatory requirements
- Written policies and procedures
- Documentation of expenses
- Cash management systems
- An efficient accounting system

⁵ Financial reporting requirements are significantly reduced for EAPs. Please see the EAP Provisions.

- Budget controls
- Time & activity documentation
- Documentation of matching requirements & in-kind contributions
- Timely, complete and accurate reporting
- Internal controls

The following are some financial management facts that new grantees may not know:

- Each AmeriCorps grant must be tracked separately from other grants and programs.
- Staff identified on the AmeriCorps grant budget – whether paid with Corporation funds or match, must maintain timesheets that document the actual amount of time spent on the AmeriCorps grant and on other activities.⁶
- If a sub-grantee is found to be out of compliance with grant requirements, CNCS will hold the parent organization liable.

For information about the components of a strong financial management system, and guidance on setting up or improving your financial management system please take a free, online course on key financial management concepts developed by Walker & Company, a CNCS training and technical assistance provider. This course is available at:

http://www.nationalservicerresources.org/resources/courses/financial_management.php

Additionally, CNCS will review the Financial Management Survey that you completed during negotiations to determine your financial management training and technical assistance needs. Depending on your needs we will refer you to appropriate training and technical assistance resources that are available to CNCS grantees.

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

Policies and Procedures

During the start-up period, you should spend time developing and documenting policies and procedures that lay the framework for how your program will be managed. A well-written and comprehensive set of policies and procedures will help your program run more efficiently and effectively, while also ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements. Some of your policies are mandated by AmeriCorps, and other program-specific policies will be ones that you create to help you manage the program.

Required Policies: Before members are enrolled, you must create policies compliant with AmeriCorps requirements. Refer to the Regulations and Provisions for guidance on developing your policies.⁷ Ask your program officer for assistance.

Some of the required policies you must create include:

- Non-discrimination
- Reasonable Accommodation

⁶ Staff timesheet requirements are relaxed for educational institutions and do not apply for EAPs. See the OMB Circulars and EAP Provisions.

⁷ Citations for requirements for the above-mentioned policies can be found at §2520.65, §2540.210, §2524.40, AC V.F:1-2 for National Directs and Tribes/AC IV.J:3a for EAPs, §2545.220-2545.230, and §2540.230

- Drug-Free Workplace
- Grievance Procedures
- AmeriCorps member safety safeguards
- Site selection criteria and process
- Record retention
- Member file maintenance
- Ensuring member confidentiality

Program-Specific Policies: Do you want to create other policies for your program? Many AmeriCorps programs develop vacation and sick leave policies for members; policies for member selection, evaluation and termination; standards of member conduct, attendance requirements, and dress codes; requirements of sites for progress reporting, raising and documenting match and promoting AmeriCorps identity; communication hierarchies, etc.

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

Program Manual

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

Site Management

A key aspect of managing your program is developing good relationships with your sites so that you can stay in regular contact with them, communicate expectations, provide training and technical assistance, hold them accountable through monitoring and oversight, and develop a strong site network in which all sites are committed to achieving shared program goals. During the program start-up period, please dedicate ample time to putting these site management systems in place.

Site Agreements

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

Training and Technical Assistance

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

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

Member Management

As National Service participants, AmeriCorps members will have different needs and expectations than your organization's employees and volunteers. Consequently, during the start-up period you will need to prepare systems and tools to manage your members. Member management includes the development of member contracts, member position descriptions, a recruitment plan, strategies for retention, quality member training, etc. The start-up period is also the time that you should develop forms that you will use to implement your member file management system, work out the details of your member "payroll" process, and choose a health care provider for your members.

Member Contracts

Before starting service, each member must sign a member contract or agreement. The contract is an important tool to ensure that your members understand what is expected of them. Please review General Provision AC IV. D.2 (or EAP Provision AC IV. E.2) for required member contract contents.

Many programs also add some of the following items:

- Start and end dates of the member's term of service
- Name of the member's supervisor
- Amount of the living allowance
- How and how often the member's living allowance will be paid
- Description of the other benefits available to the member
- Any other program-specific requirements

Member Recruitment

Many programs think of recruitment as a year-long process. Even while current members are serving, they are promoting the program to help them find next year's members. There are many steps a program can take during the start-up period to prepare for recruitment. These include:

- Before recruiting members it is crucial that your program understand the requirements for member eligibility⁸, the CNCS non-discrimination policy⁹, requirements for faith-based and community organizations for member selection¹⁰, and prohibitions against volunteer and employee duplication or displacement¹¹. In addition to age and educational attainment requirements, only U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents are eligible for service. Please note that the citizenship/lawful permanent resident requirement for service is a stricter standard than eligibility to work in the U.S., thus ***use of the standard I-9 form to check for member eligibility is not sufficient.*** Please review AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.200 for information.
- Determine whether your program will recruit nationally and/or locally for members and clarify who will be responsible for recruiting members. Some programs handle all

⁸ See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.200

⁹ See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2540.210 and AmeriCorps Provision V.G.

¹⁰ Review CNCS' FAQs for Faith-Based and Community Organizations, available at: http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/Faith_FAQs.pdf

¹¹ See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2540.100

recruitment out of the grantee organization whereas others handle all recruitment at the site level. Many programs share the responsibility.

- Develop defined position descriptions for members¹². Remember to keep your performance measure targets in mind as you create positions descriptions so that all of your members are contributing towards the stated outcomes of your project. Keep position descriptions in mind during recruitment so that you can match the right individuals with the right position.
- You might consider developing a member screening tool to help you assess each applicant's level of commitment, experience, skills, and ability to serve as a member for the required period of time. Recruiting members that are a good match for your program, along with providing quality member support and training, is the best way to achieve high retention rates.

All programs are required to post a description of their program on the web-based AmeriCorps Recruitment and Placement System.¹³ This is a great resource for spreading the word about your program. An AmeriCorps Recruitment Manual, a media kit, and other recruitment materials are available at http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/members/index.asp. To assist you in meeting your recruitment goals, please visit the new recruitment training and technical assistance website "EnCorps," available at: <http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/>

Member Orientation and Training

Once members have been enrolled, programs prepare members for service through orientation and training. Please refer to the General AmeriCorps Provision IV D. 3 or the EAP AmeriCorps Provision IV. E. 3) for required components of the orientation.

In addition, you might consider including the following topics:

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

The online publication *Starting Strong: A Guide to Pre-Service Training* is a good resource for developing or improving your orientation and pre-service training plan. Visit http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online_pubs/training/index.php to access this guide.

National Service Trust

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

¹² Allowable activities are those that correspond to the program's outlined objectives, and are compliant with AmeriCorps Regulations § 2520.25, § 2520.45, § 2520.50, § 2520.65 and AmeriCorps Provision Section IV. D. 7b

¹³ Please visit http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/members/index.asp for information.

After successfully completing a term of service, AmeriCorps members who are enrolled in the National Service Trust are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award. Members use their Education Award to pay education costs at qualified institutions of higher education, for educational training, or to repay qualified student loans. The award is \$4,725 for a year of full-time service, and is prorated for part-time. Members can access the award in full and part, and can take up to seven years after the term of service has ended to claim the award.

Information about the award amount, eligibility, limitations; a list of colleges and universities that match the education award; forbearance; interest repayment; tax implications and other important information including frequently asked questions can be accessed via: http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/benefits_ed_award.asp

CNCS recently released a new online payment system that allows members to request Education Award payments and other benefits, such as Forbearance on student loans and Interest Accrual payments, completely online. In addition, this new automated system lets members view the status of requests and provides up to date information on AmeriCorps Education Award balances. This National Service Trust functionality is part of an online system called “My AmeriCorps.” Other features of My AmeriCorps includes the ability for members and alumni to update contact information, view and print tax statements and forms, and access customized letters certifying a term of service with an AmeriCorps program. Visit http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/online/index.asp for more information about My AmeriCorps / AmeriCorps Online Payment System. My AmeriCorps can be accessed directly via <https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do>.

During program start-up, programs should become familiar with the rules and regulations related to the National Service Trust and the functions of the “My AmeriCorps” online system.

Performance Measurement

During the program start-up period most new programs are assigned to work with a performance measurement coach from Project STAR, to improve the design of their proposed performance measures. Project STAR can also assist with the development of your data collection system.

Your program officer must approve your revised performance measures. Many performance measurement revisions will require a grant amendment via eGrants.

Corporation Electronic Data Management Systems

Web-Based Reporting System (WBRS)

WBRS is a comprehensive online program management system designed to assist grantees in tracking and reporting data on their members, finances, and program progress. After your grant has been awarded, grantee information will be uploaded into WBRS. WBRS is structured so that parent organizations can determine the level of access and functionality to assign to sites.

During program start-up programs should:

- Review and approve each site Grantee Information Profile (GIP) and budget for accuracy to ensure that all contact information, budget figures, and member slots are correct.¹⁴
- Choose whether they want sites to enter member enrollments, exits, and timesheets into WBRS or whether the parent organization will take responsibility for these WBRS functions.

¹⁴ EAP sites do not have Grantee Information Profiles. Instead, they have Site Information Profiles.

- Decide whether they will require its sites to report on program progress and finances through WBRS.
- You will need to determine who will have access to WBRS at the site and/or parent organization and what level of access they should have.

For information, please visit WBRS at <http://wbrs.net> and the WBRS online Help Manual under the “Basics” tab after you have signed in via the “AmeriCorps National Direct” button.

Once you have access to WBRS, please take the WBRS Tutorials and use the Help Manual to learn about Site Reporting, Member Enrollments, Exits, Time Tracking, Change of Status, and Slot Allocations and Transfers. Tutorials are available via section 14 of the Help Manual. We will provide WBRS training for new parent organizations.

In the spring of 2008, WBRS will be retired and much of its functionality will be migrated to the My AmeriCorps portal mentioned in a previous section.

eGrants

CNCS uses the web-based system, eGrants, for:

- Submission and tracking grant applications;
- Negotiating and awarding grants;
- Managing grants including processing amendments, continuations; and
- Financial Status and Progress Reporting.

You can access eGrants via the www.americorps.gov website or bookmark this page on your computer: <https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp>

Each user at a grantee or applicant organization should have a unique login account. The grantee administrator has the ability to determine who at the organization has access to the system.

If you need assistance with eGrants, please contact the eGrants Help Desk at 888-677-7849 or via Email: egrantshelp@cns.gov. The hours of operation are 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM Eastern time, Monday through Friday. Please copy your program officer when you send messages to the help desk.

Part 6: Next Steps... Program Implementation

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

Ongoing Member Training, Support, and Retention

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

slot¹⁵), but they are an important part of a member development plan when combined with providing feedback to your members.

Monitoring

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

Providing sufficient oversight of operating sites and host sites is also in the best interest of programs because CNCS holds the parent organization responsible for infractions at the site level.

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

- Document Review
- Compliance Reviews
- Program Quality and Performance Reviews
- Special Audits or Surveys
- One-on-one technical assistance to resolve any issues

Please refer to the AmeriCorps National Site Monitoring Tool (Appendix B) for items that CNCS reviews when staff monitor program operating sites. Many programs find it helpful to model their own monitoring on ours. You might consider tailoring this monitoring tool to meet your needs.

Reporting

Programmatic Reporting: All AmeriCorps National grantees, regardless of type, must submit one annual progress report, called the Grantee Progress Report (GPR). See the AmeriCorps Provisions for information¹⁶. We will offer technical assistance calls and send you a tip sheet in writing to help you prepare your report and navigate the eGrants system. Your program officer will review your progress report and will provide feedback. If you have questions about the programmatic progress report, please ask your program officer.

Financial Reporting: Reporting requirements vary by grant type. Education Award Programs should refer to the Education Award Program Provisions section AC IV. O for information on reporting requirements.

National Directs and Planning Grants must submit two Financial Status Reports (FSR) per year.¹⁷ The FSR due on April 30, 2008 covers expenses between the start of grant through March 31, 2008. The FSR due on October 31, 2008 covers expenses from April 1, 2008 through September 30, 2008. A grantee must set its own submission deadlines for its respective sub-grantees.

For assistance with Financial Status Reports, please visit:

http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/walker/FinancialReporting_Fin.ppt . If you have questions about financial reporting, please contact your grants officer.

¹⁵ Member performance evaluations are not required of Education Award Programs. National Directs should see the AmeriCorps Provisions AC IV. D.6 for guidance.

¹⁶ General Provisions IV. N. b or the EAP Provisions IV. O

¹⁷ Please see the AmeriCorps Provisions section AC IV.N.

Please include reporting deadlines on your organizational calendar. Please refer to the calendar in the appendix section of this document for other important dates to remember as you plan your year.

State Commission Collaboration

As mentioned earlier in the document, collaboration with State Service Commissions is an important and required part of managing an AmeriCorps National program.

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

The Corporation expects all national service programs to collaborate at the local level. Your program is expected to communicate and coordinate with state commissions in the states where you operate, as described in more detail below. The list of state commissions can be found here: <http://www.nationalservice.org/about/contact/statecommission.asp>.

Specifically, you are required to:

- Provide commissions with a list including contact information for your programs in their state, and update this list on an annual basis.
- Participate in their annual needs assessment and training plan development activities, and in the development of their state service plan, as well as appropriate training and other events.
- Include state commissions on your mailing list and invite them to appropriate training and other events.

Not only can commissions provide valuable information about State laws and give you access to local AmeriCorps contacts for improved collaboration in addressing unmet needs in the state, but they can potentially offer you program development and training assistance and provide your members with great training and networking opportunities. For example, each commission receives funds from CNCS to fund program development and training (PDAT) initiatives and efforts to make service opportunities accessible to people with disabilities (Disability grants for reasonable accommodation). Commissions are encouraged to allocate some of these resources to AmeriCorps National programs operating in their states. Additionally, many commissions host statewide Days of Service, ceremonies for program launch or end-of-service, inter-corps councils for member networking and input, and so on. These opportunities can provide your members with important connections to foster a better understanding of AmeriCorps beyond your program and can assist with member development, training, and morale. Lastly, commissions are a potential source of funds for your sites should you decide not to continue a site's sub-grantee relationship with you or should your program not be funded by AmeriCorps National in future competitions.

Days of Service and Other Initiatives

Each year CNCS encourages AmeriCorps programs to participate in Corporation initiatives such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, Make a Difference Day, Mentoring Month, AmeriCorps Week and others. These initiatives present programs with a special opportunity to address unmet community needs, collaborate with other AmeriCorps programs, build corps member morale and teamwork, promote volunteerism and service in local communities, and highlight the difference AmeriCorps members make across the nation.

For information, please visit the following websites:

Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service – January 14, 2008
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/initiatives/mlkday.asp>

National Mentoring Month – January 2008
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/initiatives/nmm.asp>

National AmeriCorps Week – Dates for 2008 are to be determined
<http://www.americorps.gov/about/americorpsweek/index.asp>

Make a Difference Day – October 27, 2007
<http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/index.html>

Grant Continuation

Your application for the second year of your program is due on January 8, 2008. While continuation applications are not as time-consuming as the process of writing a new application, preparation should not be left to the last minute! Please see http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa.asp for the Notice of Funding Opportunity and Application Instructions for 2008 grant competitions.

Part 7: Additional Resources for Start-Up and Program Management

- Visit the National Service Resource Center at <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org>. The Resource Center, as it is often called, is the place you can access how-to guides, information on best practices related to all aspects of managing an AmeriCorps program, view sample forms from other programs, take online tutorials to sharpen your skills, and much more. The following pages are especially helpful:
 - Please check out the AmeriCorps National materials page of the National Service Resources Center. (This page is currently under construction. Your program officer will provide you with the link once the page is available.)
 - General AmeriCorps Program Start-up and Program Management materials can be found via:
http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/affinity_groups/program_start.php
 - Take AmeriCorps program management training e-courses: My Improvement Plan, Financial Management, and AmeriCorps 101 (AmeriCorps basic information). These courses are available at:
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/courses/>
 - Review sample AmeriCorps program forms (These forms have not been vetted by CNCS for compliance) at:
http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/sample_forms/index.php
 - Join the AmeriCorps listserv and other national service listservs. Information is available at <http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/listservs/index.php>
 - Order selected hard copy publications and videos free of charge. Please see:
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/publications/order/index.php>
 - To find out about upcoming conferences and trainings, please visit:
http://nationalserviceresources.org/link/advancedsearch/WG_URL:PAGE_ID=347:
- To help you promote your program, a media kit -- including AmeriCorps logos -- is available via http://www.americorps.gov/about/media_kit/index.asp. You can order AmeriCorps Gear and Signage via <http://www.nationalservicecatalog.org/>.
- Visit the AmeriCorps website frequently. <http://www.AmeriCorps.gov>

Closing

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

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

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