2003 AND 2004 AMERICORPS GUIDELINES: Suggested Changes and Justification

In 2003:

- Overview – page 6
  "In his state of the union address **this** year . . . "

- Page 8 -- "This year more than **60,000** AmeriCorps members will serve communities throughout the country.

- Page 9 – "In 2003 the Corporation **is announcing an initiative** to help strengthen the accountability and performance of programs . . . "

- Page 10 – Audit and Financial Information. "In 2003, we plan to review [financial information] in conjunction with the application in order to assess your organization's potential for sustainability and overall financial capacity. . . See the application instructions for additional details"

In 2004:

- "In his state of the union address **last** year . . . "

- Because of the cap imposed in 2003, it is best to change the number to 50,000 AmeriCorps members.

- "In 2004 the Corporation **will continue** to help strengthen the accountability and performance of programs . . . "

- Last year, for the first time we collected recent audits/financial statements from applicants. Staff reviewed them to determine the level of each applicant's total organizational budget and to determine the stability of the organization. A survey of grants staff after the review process demonstrated that the exercise was not very useful because most of the audits were from 2000 or 2001 – 2 years old. We recommend removing this requirement in 2004 for two reasons. The new OMB approved questions provided by the White House faith and community-based task force that we have added to our application will answer the questions we gleaned in 2003 from the audits but for a more recent year. Also, once we are able to change the questions we ask about sustainability and the diversity of organizations' funding we will be able to collect more useful information than we had in 2003 to help staff in their assessments.

In 2003:

In 2004:

Dropping this requirement of applicants does not change the requirement for approved applicants to provide a financial survey and other information prior to grant award.

- Page 15 – "We define homeland security as appropriately engaging citizens and communities in preparedness and response to acts of terrorism and other disasters. Homeland security includes program that support public safety, public health, or disaster preparedness and relief.

- Over this past year, the Corporation has adopted the OMB definition of homeland security – "The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Corporation define homeland security as appropriately engaging citizens and communities in preparedness and response to acts of terrorism and other disasters. Homeland security includes programs that prepare to minimize the damage and recovery from any emergency, natural or man-made. ' While the change may not appear to be significant, if we do not change this definition in the guidelines, we could possibly have programs applying under the homeland security issue area that do not meet our new OMB approved definition.

- Page 14 – "The Corporation has recently developed new plans for expanding training resources available to programs . . . "

- Given the expected drastic reduction in training and technical assistance funds, this sentence no longer seems appropriate and could be misleading. We recommend replacing it with the following: "The Corporation has expanded training resources available to programs develop members."

- Page 17 – Citizenship – This section states that in the coming year the Corporation will modify the two curricula, *By the People* and *A Guide to Effective Citizenship Through National Service*. Also, we said we would distribute documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

- This has been done. We recommend updating this section to say that the Corporation has modified the curricula and combined them and staff will work with a small number of programs in 2004 to pilot the combined curriculum.

  The Corporation does not have the funds to distribute these documents to every member. However, the Citizenship toolkit on our website provides a link to these documents. We recommend stating this in the guidelines to make new applicants aware of this.

In 2003:

- Page 20 – Recruitment and Management of Volunteers. "The Corporation will develop training and technical assistance resources . . ."

- Page 27 – Performance Measurement. The 2003 guidelines state, " . . . you should specify no more than five and no less than three objectives as performance measures in the objectives worksheet."

- Page 34 – Cost per member. "The average cost per member, across all programs within a state, is $12,700. The maximum cost for any individual program is $16,000." For programs applying directly to the Corporation the maximum cost per member was $12,800.

- Page 35 – Member Living Allowance. The minimum living allowance for full-time AmeriCorps members was $9,900.

- Page 47 – Promise Fellows.

In 2004:

- The Corporation has developed a Volunteer Management and Recruitment Toolkit which is available on our website. Given the importance of this issue, it would make sense to update this and reference it.

- On January 23, 2003 we placed an amendment to the 2003 guidelines on the website. This changed the requirement. The amended language reads, "Applicants are required to include at least three performance measures. We will consider any additional performance measures you submit and will negotiate them with the required measure." We recommend folding this amended language into the 2004 guidelines.

- Congressional directives and funding constraints are likely to result in the average Corporation cost per member being reduced from the 2003 amount of $12,800.

- Increase to 10,197, to reflect corresponding increase in VISTA living allowance, which is tied to cost of living.

- Since we will no longer have a separate Promise Fellows program, we need to update this information and tell programs how they can pick promise fellows up within their regular program, if they chose to do so.