

STATE SERVICE COMMISSIONER INSTITUTE SUMMARY

by Commissioner Kim Miske

I was asked to serve on the planning committee for the State Service Commissioner Institute because the committee was wanting representation from a rural commissioner in a rural state.

The purpose of the institute was to explore possible roles and strategies and to actively engage Commissioners in maximizing the visibility and impact of Governors' Service Commissions in every state.

I enjoyed attending the institute with Gary Pfister and his wife, Shelly, and Linda and Tony. It was really nice to get to know everyone better.

The first day of the Institute was New Commissioner Orientation. This included the history of National Service, the National and Community Service Trust Act, AmeriCorps overview, and CNCS and the service programs it funds. We also covered commissioner and staff roles and responsibilities, and excellence in commission operations. CNCS has a powerpoint presentation available on its website for use in training new commissioners.

Day two of the institute was kicked off by a wonderful speaker, Diana V. Rodriguez-Algra who is the Executive Director of Volunteer Centers of Michigan. She was a founding board member of the CNCS at its inception. She served on the board of directors for four years. Diana spoke about the key roles of commissioners and the importance of involving your state and national critical partners in your commission and its work.

Diana stated that the key roles for commissioners are primarily summed up in three categories. First, our role is to craft a vision for our state and reexamine that vision in terms of what we want to do and how we want to spend our money. Second, we have a fiduciary role to spend our state's money in a good manor and leverage the money well. Lastly, and our most important role, is being an advocate for our commission. We should be advocating and educating at three levels, the local level, the state level and on a national level.

Diana also spoke about change and transition for commissions. Each commission should have transition plans for changes in Governors and also for changes in Executive Directors.

She challenged us to provide fuel for our commissions by what we bring, to reach out to others to volunteer, and to educate others by telling stories and effecting simple acts such as writing op-ed pieces in our newspapers.

Later, we had two breakout sessions, choosing which workshops to attend. My first workshop was called "Engaging Commissioners" and the second was "Assuring Program Excellence." Both provided useful information and more important, good discussion with others about what works and best practices.

During the “Engaging Commissioners” session, commissioners felt that performing site visits made them more engaged in their commission activities. North Carolina has implemented site visits in a way that works for the commissioners and the program. They let the programs arrange the site visits with the Commissioners. Commissioner visits should be made with the idea of seeing the service being done, not seeing if the program requirements are being accomplished.

Youth Commissioners were discussed at length. Some states recruit youth commissioners from campus service programs. They ask for nominations from the campus service groups. Some youth commissioners have been involved with campaigns on campus where they set a goal of 10,000 hours of service and they try to get one-thousand youth to serve ten hours each. Some youth commissioners are involved with spring break service trips. Both are great ideas. The youth commissioners at the meeting were very impressive with the service they were involved in.

The “Assuring Program Excellence” session was chaired by the Chief of Staff of the California Volunteers. California has 56 AmeriCorps programs. She was very informative about what the duties are for state commissions as outlined in our state laws and the standards. She spoke about program standards and how California developed plain language standards and plain language program performance measurement worksheets for the review processes. We discussed programs and how to shut down a program in mid process if standards are not met. She also spoke about the 30-90-90-30 rule which deals with enrollment issues and cutoff dates to fill slots.

The West Virginia ED spoke about how West Virginia puts all their AmeriCorps volunteers through a “Leadership Plenty” training to develop leaders and give the volunteers the tools needed to become future leaders.

On Thursday, Gary, Linda and I met with Senator Baucus and Senator Tester in Senator Baucus’s office. We thanked them for supporting community service and asked them to continue by supporting the “Serve America” bill sponsored by Kennedy and Hatch which is before them currently. We appreciated them taking the time out of their busy schedules to meet with us.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have attended the Commissioner Institute. I met a lot of wonderful people and gained a lot of insight into the workings of commissions and the programs within them.

****Good Ideas Generated by Discussions****

- Traveling Commission meetings, hold one commission meeting a year in a location where a program is - NC holds one commission meeting by

teleconference so that they can travel for one meeting.

- Host a “Lunch and Learn” or a breakfast meeting for legislatures to promote the work of the commission and programs.
- Utilize AmeriCorps Alums
- Sub-Committees hold a monthly 30 minute conference call
- In the Unified State Plan work with all state volunteer or service organizations to come up with one “tag line” message that all use statewide. (Ex. “Live United”) Ohio hosts a yearly “Forging New Links” meeting with all volunteer agencies and their commission to develop a game plan and a tag line for their state.
- Establish a 501(c)(3) to work in partner with commission.
- Fund-raise from people or organizations that benefit or make money from the Commissions work (ex. businesses in communities where programs are, banks where state govt. is located) Commissioners fund-raise because staff cannot.
- Social networking (Facebook, Myspace) to market volunteering to the younger generation.
- Some programs and commissions are asking gas companies and stations in areas where programs are serving to donate gas cards to help the AmeriCorps members with the rising cost of gas.

Resources

AmeriCorps Alums - www.americorpsalums.org
Corporation for National and Community Service - www.nationalservice.org