

State Administrative Standards

Frequently Asked Questions

Is participation in the Standards process voluntary or mandatory?

Participation is mandatory -- the State Administrative Standards Review process is the most comprehensive monitoring tool that the Corporation for National and Community Service uses to assess the administrative capacity of state commissions. Accordingly, every state commission will go through Standards reviews. As of 2004, all commissions have completed an Administrative Standards Review. The Corporation began a second round of Standards reviews in 2004.

Will the results of this process have any impact on our funding?

In general the Standards process will not impact a commission's administrative, PDAT, disability or formula AmeriCorps funding. At the discretion of the Directors of AmeriCorps and the Deputy Director of AmeriCorps*State, the results of this process *could* impact new competitive and special initiative funding. The Corporation feels that a commission with weak administrative systems should work on strengthening those systems rather than take on greater program responsibility. The results of the Standards review also inform the Corporation of specific administrative areas where T/TA investments should be made to support commissions. As your partner in managing federal grants, the Corporation uses the Standards review to inform methods of building commission capacity and recognizing best practices.

Why do we have to go through the Standards review AND through an Inspector General audit?

The Standards review is not an audit -- it is a tool used to evaluate the current capacity of commissions to effectively manage and administer federal funds. In general, the Standards review team will look at the commission systems for the *last full program year*. Typically the Inspector General's audits look at past expenditures and systems to

determine financial stewardship for two years of operation. Let's take the example of a commission that had unexplained expenditures in 2005 but in 2006 it created and continues to use solid systems that meet all of the State Administrative Standards. The commission could be successful in a 2007 Standards review, but might receive negative Inspector General audit findings because of the unexplained expenditures in 2005. The Standards review also examines features of commission operations which are not covered in an Inspector General audit -- including the suitability of the structure of the commission and the composition of commissioners, the use of a satisfactory RFP process, and the quality of the assessment and training and technical assistance provided to commission sub-grantees.

What is the Corporation process for selecting commissions for a Standards Review?

The AmeriCorps*State Office uses several criteria for selecting commissions for Standards reviews, including the date of the commission's last Standards review, the commission's priority rating in the Corporation's monitoring planning and assessment process, whether a commission is scheduled for an Inspector General Audit, and other factors Corporation staff determines have an impact on the timeliness of the review.

How far in advance of a Standards review are commissions notified of their selection for a review?

The AmeriCorps*State Office notifies commissions of their selection for a Standards review once the annual Corporation-wide monitoring planning and assessment process is completed. Typically, commission notifications are in early to mid October.

How will a commission benefit from going through the Standards process?

Standard reviews give commissions the opportunity to examine their administrative systems in a

comprehensive way. At the end of the process, they *know* their own strengths and weaknesses, which helps strengthen their management of Corporation funds and compliance with Corporation requirements, and preparations for the Inspector General audit. Meeting all Standards, or resolving un-met Standards successfully and on time, confirms that the commission has the administrative infrastructure to manage additional Corporation support or resources, including new competitive and special initiative funds.

What does the week of the Administrative Standards Review look like?

The Standards review week begins on a Monday with an orientation meeting with staff and other stakeholders. Typically, Monday afternoon through Wednesday afternoon is devoted to work on the Standards, including talking with individual staff members, conducting interviews, reviewing documentation, and conducting a site visit to one program. The review team uses Thursday to write up their report and for any follow-up questions for commission staff. On Friday morning the review team holds an exit meeting with commission staff and other stakeholders. *(Please refer to **The Standards Visit** section in this document for more detailed information, and examples of other stakeholders who may be invited to the orientation and exit meetings.)*

What should we do if we don't meet all the Standards?

Your program officer at the Corporation is the main point of contact for helping you resolve any unmet Standards elements. Immediately after your Standards review, you and your program officer jointly develop a corrective action plan to remedy any unmet Standards. Commissions have a maximum of six months to address critical elements and twelve months to meet all elements. However, this timeline may vary depending on the nature of the unmet elements. For example, some unmet critical elements, such as adequate processes for ensuring member eligibility, need to be addressed immediately. When you and your program officer feel that you have met the previously unmet

Standards, the Standards project manager will review your documentation and let you know if it satisfies the requirements.

Where do I get a copy of the Administrative Standards Review tool?

The latest version of the Administrative Standards Review tool is available on-line at http://americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp

How do we prepare for the Standards?

Your Corporation program officer is the main point of contact to help you prepare for a Standards review. You and your program officer will work with the Corporation training and grants officers to assess and strengthen the commission's administrative capacities. The Corporation further supports a commission in preparing for the Standards review through Project TASC. Project TASC provides assistance to commissions in planning for the Standards review through peer visits. Following the Standards review, the commission can request assistance from Project TASC or other relevant T/TA providers in taking corrective action. Commissions are also strongly encouraged to use the Standards tool in preparing for their review.

How long will it take us to prepare for the Standards?

It is difficult to estimate the exact amount of time it takes to prepare for a Standards review, since every commission is different. Generally, preparation for a Standards review depends on existing commission capacities and the status of commission administrative systems. The Standards tool is an important instrument for Commissions in assessing their capacity. You should work with your Corporation program officer to determine the time needed to prepare the commission for a Standards review. Please note that it will take a concerted effort on the part of the commission staff to focus on this important project.

State Administrative Standards

Background

- Spring 1998-present** A Standards Working Group -- composed of commission executive directors and Corporation for National & Community Service staff -- was created to assist the Corporation in producing a tool that clearly articulates what is expected of state commission administrative systems
- May-Sept 1999** The *Standards Pilot Project* completed Administrative Standards Reviews in MT, FL, AZ, WV, OH, TX
- February 2000** The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approved the State Administrative Standards Reviews
- 2000-2004** All State commissions completed an Administrative Standards Review
- 2004-2005** Eleven commissions completed a second Administrative Standards Review: AK, AZ, DE, FL, IN, MS, MT, NJ, OR, TX, WV
- 2006** Six commissions completed a second Administrative Standards Review: AL, NM, OH, IL, GA, WY
- 2007** Six commissions completed a second Administrative Standards Review: NY, CO, MA, CA, LA & RI
- 2008** Six commissions completed a second Administrative Standards Review: MD, NE, OK, PA, TN, UT
- 2009** Six to seven commissions have been selected for a second Standards Review: ID, WA, WI, SC, MI and ME

State Administrative Standards

Purpose

Purpose

The purpose of the State Administrative Standards is to ensure that:

- State commissions have proper management systems in place for the administration of federal funds in order to implement national service.
- The Corporation has an effective tool for assessing state commission systems.
- State commissions with quality administrative capacities are recognized.

Objectives of the Standards

- To establish the basic competencies of state commission operations.
- To provide a set of standards that all commissions must meet without prescribing the strategy each commission uses to achieve the standards.
- To provide a consistent strategy for assessing the capacity of all state commissions.
- To help state commissions identify areas for continuous improvement and technical assistance needs.
- To help the Corporation identify priorities for training and technical assistance for state commissions in order to strengthen the capacity of commissions.

Use of the Standards

- The State Administrative Standards is one of the major tools used by the Corporation to

assess the administrative capacity of state commissions.

- The Standards enable the Corporation to apply consistent criteria to the assessment of state commission operations and to make well-informed decisions about funding.
- The Standards help commissions pinpoint and diagnose their technical assistance needs.
- Once needs are clearly defined, commissions can improve their foundational systems, creating a reliable infrastructure for the future of national service.
- The Corporation for National & Community Service is committed to using training and technical assistance resources to help commissions meet the State Administrative Standards.

State Administrative Standards

The Standards Visit

Who is on the Standards Review Team?

In general, 4-6 individuals will make up the Standards review team. The team will be composed of both Corporation staff and outside contractors.

The team includes the following roles:

- **Team Leader.** The team leader is the primary liaison between the review team and the commission executive director.
- **Financial Expert.** The financial team member will be responsible for fiscal Standards 4 and 8.
- **The AmeriCorps*State Program Officer** for the state.
- **Team Member(s).** Contractor or Corporation for National & Community Service staff. Corporation staff may be from headquarters or from state offices. The state office staff will not be from the same state as the commission.

Interviews

There are four Standards interview modules: program directors, commission staff, commissioners, and outside stakeholders. The team leader and the executive director decide on the list of people to be interviewed. The commission sets up the interview schedule.

The purpose of the interviews is to give the “human story” to the documentation being reviewed by the Standards review team and to corroborate the administrative systems of the commissions. The interviews are never directly quoted in the report. A report might include the following example: “Interviews with program directors confirmed that programs are asked to complete a needs assessment on an annual basis.”

The Standards Visit: Monday – Friday.

Listed below is an outline of how a Standards visit is generally planned. The Standards review team leader will work with the commission’s executive director to create a work plan that considers the needs of the commission staff and of the review team.

- **Monday morning. Orientation Meeting.** This meeting is facilitated by the team leader. It is most effective if the entire commission staff is present for the meeting. Other participants and stakeholders (at the option of the executive director) might include the commission chair, state office director, and the SEA director.
- **Monday afternoon through Wednesday afternoon. Work on the Standards at the Commission.** Team members will talk with individual staff members, conduct interviews, review documentation, and conduct a site visit

to one program. During this time the team leader will stay in contact with the executive director regarding the progress of the review.

- **Thursday. Work on the Standards Report.**

The review team will use Thursday to write up the Standards report and to meet as a team to discuss the findings. The team will also use Thursday for any follow-up questions for

commission staff. Either Thursday or early Friday, the team leader will meet with the executive director to describe the results of the review.

- **Friday. Exit meeting.** On Friday morning there will be an exit meeting with the review team and commission staff/stakeholders as determined by the executive director.

State Administrative Standards

Timeline

October-November	Commissions are notified that they have been selected for an Administrative Standards Review.
Prior to the Standards visit	<p>Commission staff work with the AmeriCorps*State program and OLDT officers to prepare for the review. They will agree on the resources needed to prepare the commission, such as working with providers, and/or a peer visit from a commission that has already completed a Standards review. Peers cannot tell you whether or not you have met a Standard, but they can share their experience and offer suggestions.</p> <p>The commission begins to pull together documentation for the review.</p>
Self-Assessments	Although not a requirement, commissions are encouraged to use the Administrative Standards Review tool to complete a Self-Assessment of their own administrative capacities; and to make the Self-Assessment available to the Standards review team. A Self-Assessment is an effective tool for identifying commission strengths and weaknesses, the need for training and technical assistance, and expediting the review process once the review team arrives.
One month prior to the Standards visit	The team leader contacts the executive director to jointly plan the details of the visit.
STANDARDS VISIT	The Standards review team will arrive in town on Sunday night. They will work at the commission Monday through Wednesday. Thursday is a work day for the team at their hotel. However, reviewers may contact the commission for clarification and/or additional information. Friday morning is the exit meeting which is usually over by noon.

Following the Standards Visit

- The Commission has **six months** from the week of the Standards review to meet all unmet critical Standards elements.
- The Commission has **one year** from the week of the Standards review to meet all other unmet Standards elements and close the Standards process.
- The Commission should begin addressing any identified unmet elements as soon as possible after the Standards review.

The Commission should work closely with its Corporation Program Officer on actions needed and a timeline for meeting all unmet elements and successfully closing the Standards process within the required timelines.

Successful resolution of an unmet element requires that the Program Officer review all of the supporting Commission information and documentations, and confirm with other Corporation staff and the Standards Review Team that the documents address the unmet element. The process for resolving an unmet element can be time-consuming. It is of utmost importance that the Commission consider this fact in planning viable timelines with its Program Officer for successful closure of the Commission's Standards process.

3 weeks prior to the review	Commission submits self-assessment
Review	
After the week of the review	Commission begins addressing unmet elements
2-4 weeks after the review	Corporation submits draft report to commission
2 weeks after receipt of the draft	Commission submits comments to Corporation, including any additional documents that can resolve unmet elements prior to the development of the final Standards report
2-4 weeks after receipt of commission comments	Corporation submits final report to commission
As soon as possible but no later than 6 months after the review	Commission must submit appropriate documentation and meet unmet critical elements.
As soon as possible but no later than 1 year after the review	Commission must submit appropriate documentation and meet all unmet elements
2-4 weeks after receipt of commission documentation but no later than 2-4 weeks after year of review	Corporation completes review of commission actions reported and documentation, and sends a final letter to the commission on the successful or unsuccessful closure of the Standards process.