Resources for AmeriCorps State and National Planning Grantees
FY 2012

June 2012

Corporation for
NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE ★★★

Part 1: Introduction

Congratulations for being awarded a FY 2012 AmeriCorps State and National planning grant.

Planning grant award recipients spend one year developing an application for an AmeriCorps program that would be submitted in a subsequent grant competition. Of the categories of grants described below, these include AmeriCorps State and National Competitive, Full-time Fixed Amount Grants (Non-EAP), and Indian Tribes grants.

This document is intended to highlight grant requirements, where to find them, and provide you with helpful hints as a supplement to the AmeriCorps Provisions, Regulations and your Notice of Grant Award.

This resource document includes information specific to direct planning grantees. Although much of the information will be relevant for singe-state planning grantees, there are likely to be several significant differences. It is imperative that single-state planning grantees discuss the information provided in this resource document with their state commission because the commission may have additional requirements and/or resources available to support the planning period.

Overview of AmeriCorps State and National

AmeriCorps State and National programs recruit, train and place AmeriCorps members to address unmet community needs.

Multi-state programs and Tribal programs (known collectively as "Direct Programs") are directly funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

Single-state programs are funded through State Service Commissions. 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.

Direct programs are awarded funds through AmeriCorps State and National Competitive grant opportunities. Single-state programs are awarded funds through AmeriCorps State and National Competitive or State Formula opportunities.

Contact State Service Commissions to find out about opportunities for formula-funded AmeriCorps programming.   A list of commission contact information can be found here: http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/statecommission.asp

The current categories of competitive AmeriCorps State and National grants are described below. Please review the 2013 Notice of Funding Opportunity to learn about the categories that will be offered in the next grant competition.

A. State and National Competitive

These grants are awarded to organizations that are proposing a project that operate in only one state and that are put forward to the Corporation by Governor-appointed State or Territory Commissions; and to organizations that propose to operate AmeriCorps programs in more than one state and apply directly to the Corporation. Applicants are eligible to apply for funding for members' living allowance and program costs.

B. State and National Professional Corps

These grants are awarded to organizations that propose to operate a Professional Corps program in a single or multiple states. Professional Corps programs that operate in only one state are put forward to the Corporation by Governor-appointed State or Territory Commissions. Professional Corps programs that operate in more than one state apply directly to the Corporation. Professional Corps programs place AmeriCorps members as teachers, health care providers, police officers, engineers, or other professionals in communities where there is an inadequate number of such professionals. Applicants are eligible to apply for funding for a portion of program costs, and use their own or other resources to pay the members' living allowance and additional member costs.

C. States and Territories without Commissions
Applicants in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Virgin Islands apply directly to the Corporation. Applicants are eligible to apply for funds for member support and program costs. State or Territory government entities are not eligible to apply.

D. State and National Education Award Program (EAP) Fixed-amount Grants
Applicants are eligible to apply for a small fixed-amount grant and use their own or other resources for the members' living allowance and program costs. There is no match requirement for EAP grants. Unlike Full-time Fixed-amount grants, EAPs may enroll full-time and less-than-full-time members. Organizations operating in a single state and nominated by Governor-appointed State Commissions: and organizations that operate their AmeriCorps program in more than one state may apply.

E. Full-time Fixed-amount Grants (Non-EAP)
Full-time fixed-amount grants are available for programs that enroll full-time members only. Applicants apply for a fixed amount per MSY and use their own or other resources for the remaining costs of the program. There is no match requirement for fixed-amount grants, but organizations must still raise the additional funds needed to run the program. There are special requirements related to participation of fixed amount grantee participation in Corporation-Sponsored evaluations to measure the success of the fixed-amount grant pilot. Additionally, full-time fixed-amount grantees in the Education Focus Area will be required to select national performance measures. Applicants proposing non-education programs may select from the national measures or report on their own performance measures. Organizations operating in a single state and nominated by Governor-appointed State Commissions, including single-state Professional Corps programs; and organizations in States and Territories without Commissions, and Indian Tribes may apply for a full-time fixed-amount grant.

F. Indian Tribes
The Corporation sets aside one-percent of grant funds to support programs operated by Indian Tribes and selected by the Corporation on a competitive basis. Applicants are eligible to apply for funds for members' living allowance and program costs.

CNCS Staff Roles
There is a team of staff here at the Corporation to support direct planning grantees. The team includes an Acting Director with responsibility for the AmeriCorps State and National grant programs, Deputy Directors, Program Officers, and Grants Officers. By now you have already been in communication with your program officer who will soon connect you with the other members of the team.

- **Acting Director**: Rosa Moreno-Mahoney (RMMahoney@cns.gov/202-606-7556) is responsible for the strategy and overall direction of AmeriCorps State and National programs.

- **Deputy Directors**: Jennifer Bastress Tahmasebi and Rob Glazier (Acting Deputy Director) supervise staff and oversee the unit's operations. Please feel free to provide Jennifer (JBastressTahmasebei@cns.gov) or Rob (rglazier@cns.gov) with your feedback, concerns, or suggestions.

- **Program Officers (POs):** Your program officer is your primary point of contact with the Corporation. He/she will support you during the planning and assist in resolving issues that arise concerning your grant. Program officers review progress reports and monitor grants for compliance with AmeriCorps requirements. They can answer your questions about grant policies and the application instructions. They cannot help you write or edit the application that you will be preparing during the planning process. 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 planning grantee, you should be in regular contact with your program officer.

- **Grants Officers:** Grants Officers work in the Office of Grants Management (OGM) and are responsible for fiscal issues concerning your grant. Your program officer will provide you with the name and contact information for your grants officer. Grants officers review your Federal Financial Reports (FFRs) 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.

Part 2: Grant Award Process

Soon after notification that your organization has been approved for a grant, your program officer will contact you to inform you of any steps you must take before the grant can be awarded.

It is a good idea to keep your stakeholders informed of the start-up process timeframe, including the budget period start date. You will not be able to access grant funds until the grant award is issued <u>and</u> the budget period has begun.

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. You should have completed these documents during the application clarification process. If your account has not been set up yet please notify your program officer immediately.

All grantees must complete a quarterly report 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.

If you have questions about the HHS Payment Management System or the Federal Financial Report, please contact your grants officer.

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 is contingent upon the resolution of all programmatic and budgetary issues. 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

In addition to the staff team mentioned previously, many resources will be at your disposal to support you during the planning period. Planning grantees that dedicate sufficient time to taking advantage of available support tend to have much more successful planning periods than grantees that do not.

Below is a summary of these resources, with particular emphasis on the ones that you will utilize most as a planning grantee.

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

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

- **Topical Conference Calls or Webinars –** We will offer approximately 4 conference calls for planning grantees on topics of common interest, such as defining member activities; partner/site selection and development; member recruitment, training and support; and community involvement, community outputs and outcomes. Some of these calls will be offered in a webinar format. These calls/webinars will be led by program officers with input or participation from current grantees. Conference calls and webinars may be offered on topics of interest to all AmeriCorps programs. Topics might include prohibited activities, performance measurement, data collection, criminal history checks, etc. You can find a list of the currently scheduled events on the Resource Center calendar at http://nationalserviceresources.org/resources/calendar.

- **Conferences**
    - **National Conference on Service and Volunteering** – Convened by the Points of Light Institute, the National Conference on Volunteering and Service is the largest annual gathering of volunteer leaders in the United States. Your participation in this conference is not required. Please talk with your program officer about whether it would be a good use of your funds and time to attend. It will take place in Chicago June 18-20, 2012.
    - **AmeriCorps State & National Grantee Meeting –** This meeting is the annual gathering of all AmeriCorps State and National grantees for training and discussion about current issues, including CNCS policies. The Corporation offers a special Program Start Up Institute for new programs as part of the grantee meeting schedule. It is expected that planning grantees attend the Grantee Meeting and Program Start Up Institute. Please plan to travel to Washington, DC September 18-21 for this important gathering.

- **Peer Support –** We encourage grantees to network with one another for peer support. 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 the 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 listserves, such as the general AmeriCorps listserv (ACList). Please visit http://nationalserviceresources.org/lists/aclist for descriptions of listservs and subscription information. Because ACList generates a significant amount of email, you might want to choose the digest option.

- The CNCS Tribes listserv is likely to be a useful resource for Indian Tribes planning grants. Please visit http://nationalserviceresources.org/lists/cnstribes for information.

- **Online Resources**–We highly recommend that you utilize the online National Service Resource Center during the planning period to help you develop strong systems that will support your program.

  - The **National Service Resource Center**, http://www.nationalserviceresources.org connects service programs with targeted training, information and tools. Its offerings include online training tools and publications, an events calendar, the Effective Practices Collection, a library of printed publications, videos and other media available for loan to grantees of the Corporation for National and Community Service – including AmeriCorps.

  - **Learning Pathways for Program Start-up** http://nationalserviceresources.org/program-start-up The AmeriCorps Program Start-Up Online Resource is a user-friendly learning pathway to information, resources and tools to successfully launch and sustain an AmeriCorps Program.

  - Please see Part 6 of this document for additional online resources for planning, start-up and program management.

Part 4: Rules and Regulations
Please spend a significant amount of time during the planning period becoming familiar with the rules and regulations for AmeriCorps grants, as well as applicable state and federal requirements. This point cannot be emphasized enough.

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 include the Statute, Regulations, Provisions, and Policies.

- **The Statute** is The National and Community Service Act of 1990 (Public Law 101–610, Nov. 16, 1990, 104 Stat. 3127) (42 U.S.C. 12501 et seq.) [As Amended Through P.L. 111–13, Enacted April 21, 2009]. The statute authorizes the federally funded initiative of AmeriCorps. You won't need to refer to the statute in the day-to-day management of your AmeriCorps program.

- **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** are additional grant requirements. New Provisions are issued each year. Citations for Provisions are written like this: [AC I. B.2]. There is a set of Provisions for 2012 Planning Grants.
  http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp#provisions

- **AmeriCorps State and National Policy FAQs** consist of links to various FAQs and policy guidance provided to grantees.

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.

The items mentioned above are accessible via the "Manage Current Grants" section of the AmeriCorps website: http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp. Using Internet Explorer, please use the searchable directory of grant requirements, which is accessible via http://www.americorps.gov/help/ac_sn_all_2012/WebHelp/index.htm

Also accessible on the right column of the above link is the "Communications Center" for AmeriCorps State and National grantees. Important communications sent to you through our official email distribution list, including AmeriCorps State and National policy updates and other critical information will be posted here for your reference.

Once you have determined your internal communication structure for managing your grant, please provide your program officer with contact information for your primary and secondary points of contacts. He/she will ensure that these contacts are included on our official email distribution list and in our program directory.

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.

Part 5: Program Planning Considerations
The deadline to submit your application for a 2013 AmeriCorps grant will be here before you know it. Be sure to manage your time effectively and set benchmarks to guide the planning process.

As you read the 2013 Application Instructions[1], 2013 Notice of Funding Opportunity, and Regulations and Provisions, you will see that there are many considerations for developing a competitive AmeriCorps program. You should communicate regularly with your program officer as you develop a strong program design, key community partnerships and operating/service site relationships, sound member recruitment and development plans, systems for organizational capacity, budget, sustainability plan, and structure for oversight and monitoring. Please be aware that your program officer and other CNCS staff are unable to review drafts of your application.

Also spend time during the planning period ensuring that you have strong systems for 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 the planning grant. Please discuss others with your program officer.

During your planning period you should spend time identifying the community problems you will address, find evidence to document the severity of those community problems, choose member activities that research and other evidence suggests will be effective towards addressing those community problems, and determine how you will measure your program's impact using aligned performance measures. Planning grantees should become familiar with the CNCS national performance measures to determine if their program design aligns with the CNCS outputs and outcomes and data collection requirements for using national performance measures. Evidence-based member interventions and rigorous performance management systems are very important to CNCS.

Financial Management Systems

Under CNCS regulations, grantees must maintain financial management systems that provide accurate, complete, and current disclosure of AmeriCorps grant finances.[2] We strongly recommend that program and fiscal staff work together to ensure grant compliance. Please share this document with your fiscal colleagues even if they are experienced in the management of other Federal grants.

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
- 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.

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[1] The Application Instructions and Notice of Funding Opportunity will be posted to the http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/national.asp webpage as soon as they are available.

[2] Financial reporting requirements are significantly reduced for EAPs and other fixed-price grants.

- 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.[3]
- If a sub-grantee is found to be out of compliance with grant requirements, CNCS will hold the direct grantee 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 that is available at: http://nationalserviceresources.org/online-courses/key-concepts-of-financial-management

There are many other helpful financial management training resources available here: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/program-financial-and-grant-management/financial-management Please revisit this page at the end of July for the materials from the 2012 Financial and Grants Management Institute.

Policies and Procedures
During the planning period, you should develop and document policies and procedures that lay the framework for how your program would 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 policies are mandated by grant requirements, but you will want to create other policies as well that are tailored to your proposed program and your organization.

Required Policies: You should create policies compliant with AmeriCorps requirements. Refer to the Regulations and Provisions for guidance on developing your policies.[4] Ask your program officer for assistance.

Your policies must ensure compliance with grant requirements, including:

- Prohibited Activities
- Non-discrimination
- Reasonable Accommodation
- Drug-Free Workplace
- Grievance Procedures
- National Service Criminal History Check
- AmeriCorps member safety safeguards
- Site selection criteria and process
- Recordkeeping
- Member eligibility documentation
- Member information confidentiality

Site Management
Effective site management is a critical component of a successful AmeriCorps program so dedicate ample time during the planning grant developing site management systems. Key elements include a plan for site selection, maintaining regular contact with sites, communicating expectations, providing training and technical assistance, holding sites accountable through

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[3] Staff timesheet requirements are relaxed for educational institutions and do not apply for EAPs. See the OMB Circulars and the Provisions.

[4] Citations for requirements for the above-mentioned policies are can be found at http://www.americorps.gov/help/ac_sn_all_2012/WebHelp/index.htm

monitoring and oversight, and developing a strong site network in which all sites are committed to performance and compliance expectations.

Site Agreements
Site agreements (contract, or memorandum of understanding, etc.) outline the terms of each site's participation in an AmeriCorps program. There should be written agreements with operating sites, as well as with any member service sites that are part of a program. While grantees are required to ensure that sites are aware of all applicable grant requirements, 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. Grantees also might 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 grantee organization staff and operating site (sub-grantee and/or service location) staff, on the tasks that are required of their role.

Many grantees find it helpful to spend part of the planning 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 have different needs and expectations than an organization's employees and volunteers. Consequently, during the planning grant period you will need to prepare systems and tools to manage AmeriCorps members and ensure that they have a powerful service experience. Member management includes the development of member contracts, member position descriptions, a recruitment plan, strategies for retention, quality member training, etc.

Member Service Agreement/Contract
Before starting service, each member must sign a member contract. The contract is an important tool to ensure that AmeriCorps members understand what is expected of them. It can be useful to use the planning period to develop a draft member contract. Please review the Provisions for member contract requirements.

Member Recruitment, Eligibility and Suitability
During the planning grant period it would be helpful to consider important aspects of member recruitment, eligibility and suitability such as the following:

- Gain an understanding of the minimum requirements for all AmeriCorps programs[5] member eligibility requirements [6], the CNCS non-discrimination policy[7], the CNCS criminal history check requirements[8], considerations for faith-based and community organizations for member selection[9], and prohibitions against volunteer and employee duplication or displacement[10]. 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 proposed program would recruit nationally and/or locally for members and clarify who would be responsible for recruiting members. Some programs handle all recruitment out of the grantee organization whereas others handle all recruitment at the site level. Many programs use a combination of the two approaches.
- Develop position descriptions for members[11] and determine what minimum qualifications members should have at the time they are selected for service.
- Develop your recruitment plan in conjunction with your member training plan because recruitment and training together determine whether an individual will be able to successfully perform the duties you outline in the member position descriptions.
- Develop a 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 the programs where they serve, along with providing quality member support and training, are important ways to achieve high retention rates.

CNCS offers an AmeriCorps Recruitment Manual, a media kit, and other recruitment materials, which are available at http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/members/index.asp Please also visit the recruitment training and technical assistance website "EnCorps," available at: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/index.php

Member Orientation and Training
Planning grantees should dedicate time to developing a plan for member orientation and training.

In addition to the orientation topics that are mandated in the Regulations and Provisions, the following topics are also important:
- Introduction to National Service & AmeriCorps
- Orientation to the community to be served
- Program rules, regulations and expectations
- Review of the member contract

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[5] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.100

[6] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.200 Subpart B Participant Eligibility, Requirements, and Benefits

[7] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2540.210 and the AmeriCorps Provisions C. 75. "Non Discrimination"

[8] See the AmeriCorps Regulations § 2522.205 -207, and § 2540.200-207, and see helpful information available at http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/criminal-history and http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/Frequently_Asked_Questions_for_Final_Rule_April_15_2010.pdf

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

[10] See the AmeriCorps Regulations SEC. 177. [42 U.S.C. 12637]

[11] 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.

- 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, including the prohibited activities
- Member evaluation
- Site-specific information (schedule, dress code, professionalism, workspace logistics, the local community, etc.)

The National Service Resource Center offers some excellent resources to help you develop a comprehensive member training plan. Please see http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/mt_home.php . Another online publication, *Starting Strong: A Guide to Pre-Service Training* is a good resource for developing an orientation and pre-service training plan. Visit http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/pre-service-training to access this guide.

National Service Trust
During the planning grant period, grantees should become familiar with the rules and regulations related to the 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 a portion of the 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.

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 amount of the education award is pegged to the amount of the Pell Grant and can be found in the Provisions for each grant year. Members can access the award in full and in 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

Ongoing Member Training, Support, and 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 instilling an ethic of service, and providing "Life After AmeriCorps" training are core components of an AmeriCorps training and member support plan. You can find information about several of these topics here: http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/mt_topics.php . Mid-term and end-of-term performance evaluations are not only required[12], but they are an important part of a member development plan when combined with providing feedback to members.

Monitoring
As stewards of public funding, grantees must ensure that their operating sites/sub-grantees and service sites are aware of their contractual requirements, and are in compliance with all of the

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[12] See § 2522.220 (d)

rules, regulations, and provisions governing AmeriCorps funds and programs. Planning grantees should develop plans for how they would monitor their proposed program for compliance.

An adequate monitoring strategy features an array of oversight activities with grantees/sites that might include:

- Reviewing member files and financial documents for compliance
- Site visits using a tool to assess compliance
- Program Quality and Performance Reviews
- One-on-one technical assistance to resolve any issues

Reporting

Programmatic Reporting: All AmeriCorps National grantees, including planning grantees, must submit one annual progress report, called the Grantee Progress Report (GPR). See the AmeriCorps Provisions for information[13]. We will send you a tip sheet 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 and are outlined in the Provisions. Planning grantees must submit a Federal Financial Report (FFR) twice during the planning grant period. FFRs are due on October 31, 2012 and April 30, 2013. Payment Management System reports (also called FFRs) are also due at the end of each quarter.

If you have questions about financial reporting, please contact your grants officer.

We suggest including reporting deadlines on your organizational calendar.

State Commission Collaboration

As mentioned earlier in the document, collaboration with State Service Commissions is an important and required part of applying for an AmeriCorps grant. Tribal programs are excluded from the requirement to collaborate with State Service Commissions, but we encourage collaboration to the extent that collaboration is possible.

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 non-Tribal[14] national service programs to collaborate at the local level. Applicants are expected to communicate and coordinate with state commissions in the states where they plan to 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, applicants are required to:

- Consult with the State Commissions of each state in which the organization plans to operate and discuss this consultation in the grant application.

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[13] Grant Provisions IV. I. Reporting Requirements.

[14] Tribal programs are excluded from the requirement to collaborate with State Service Commissions, but we encourage collaboration to the extent that collaboration is possible because it can be mutually beneficial.

Grantees are required to complete the following post-award:
- Provide State Commissions with a list including contact information for National programs in their state after grants are awarded, and update this list on an annual basis.
- Participate in the State Commission's 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 the National grantee's mailing list and invite them to appropriate training and other events.

Not only can commissions provide valuable information about State laws and give grantees access to local AmeriCorps contacts for improved collaboration in addressing unmet needs in the state, but they can potentially offer program development and training assistance.

Days of Service
Each year CNCS encourages AmeriCorps grantees to participate in National Days of Service such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, AmeriCorps Week, National Day of Service and Remembrance and others. These National Days of Service present programs with a special opportunity to 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.

A few of the biggest National Days of Service are listed below. Others can be found by conducting a search in the National Service Resource Center for "Days of Service."
For information, please visit the following websites:
National Day of Service and Remembrance – September 11
http://www.serve.gov/sept11.asp
Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service – January 21, 2013
http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/initiatives/mlkday.asp or http://www.mlkday.gov/
National AmeriCorps Week – Dates for AmeriCorps Week 2013 have not yet been determined.
For information on the 2012 AmeriCorps Week, visit
http://americorpsweek.gov/pages/about/about.asp

Part 6: Best Practices, Benchmarks and Resources
Best Practices for Planning Grantees
1. Participate in regular check-in calls with program officer. Prepare questions in advance so that you can get the most out of these discussions. Program officers are equipped to clarify grant requirements, application instructions, etc. He/she can help you think through the advantages and disadvantages of various program designs and specific program implementation plans and systems you are considering or developing. They can also provide you with contact information of current grantees that might be able to offer you tips on planning your program.
2. Make sure that you dedicate sufficient staff time to the development of the program because the planning grant year is very time intensive! Although many resources, templates and "samples" exist to help new programs, AmeriCorps is simply not an "off the shelf" or "out of the box" type of program to implement and manage.
3. Take advantage of all of the training and technical assistance opportunities available to you. Besides being in close contact with your program officer, also be sure to attend all CNCS training conferences, utilize the tutorials and other tools available through the National Service Resource Center, www.nationalserviceresources.org, and participate in CNCS sponsored webinars and conference calls.
4. Spend a lot of time getting to know the Provisions, Regulations, Policy FAQs, etc. AmeriCorps grant requirements are complex even for grantees with prior experience

with Federal programs, and it is essential that you keep AmeriCorps grant requirements in mind as you plan your programs.

5. Use the Resources for AmeriCorps State and National Planning Grantees, the Learning Pathways for Program Start-up http://nationalserviceresources.org/program-start-up , the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and the Application Instructions to help guide your planning process.

6. Use the planning period to get a lot of input and buy-in from your community stakeholders in the development of the project. Begin the process of site recruitment and partner development early.

7. Call and email current AmeriCorps programs to learn about their program designs, how they manage their projects, how they raise funds to support their programs, and whether there are opportunities for collaboration. By learning from a wide variety of programs, you can choose or adapt a program design that will work best for you and ensure that you are not duplicating existing services without building on them, or missing out on potential partnerships.

8. Develop a planning timeline and stick to it. You will be amazed by how quickly the planning year will pass. Don't be caught scrambling in the months before the application deadline.

9. Once you know the states where you would like members to serve, contact the state commissions of those states as soon as possible to discuss your plans, learn about collaboration opportunities, and ask for information on the state laws that would impact the members in their respective states. It can take some time and follow-up to get the information you need.

10. Involve your accounting staff in the planning of the program because preparing an AmeriCorps budget and financial systems can be time consuming even for grantees that are already familiar with AmeriCorps grant requirements and federal standards for financial management.

11. Get individuals who are unfamiliar with your proposal to review your application against the selection criteria prior to submitting it so that you can get outsider opinions as to whether your plans are clear and compelling. Your program officer is not able to review or help you write your application.

Benchmarks for Planning Grant Success
The following are suggested benchmarks for success during the planning year. Talk with your program officer to determine the order that makes best sense to you.

By the end of May it is suggested that you have:
☐ Had at least one check-in calls with your program officer
☐ Begun meeting with an advisory committee/stakeholders who provide input on the planning process
☐ Read the grant Provisions and Regulations
☐ Read the Learning Pathways for Program Start-up http://nationalserviceresources.org/program-start-up and the other sections of this guide, "Guidance for AmeriCorps State and National Planning Grantees"
☐ Started becoming familiar with the tools available through the National Service Resource Center
☐ Solidified your planning timeline and begun crossing off some of your early action items

By the end of June it is suggested that you have:
☐ Begun contacting current grantees to learn about their programs
☐ Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer
☐ Determined what evidence-based intervention(s) can be utilized by AmeriCorps members to address a compelling community problem

- ☐ Continued meeting with stakeholders to inform your planning
- ☐ Started to identify your potential community partners and service sites, or at least the criteria by which they will be selected
- ☐ Identified potential in-kind and cash donors
- ☐ Considered the number of AmeriCorps members needed, slot type, service activities
- ☐ Drafted a program budget

By the end of July it is suggested that you have:
- ☐ Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer
- ☐ Continued meeting with stakeholders for planning input
- ☐ Defined stakeholder roles for program implementation
- ☐ Completed the documentation of community needs to be addressed by member activities
- ☐ Determined your staffing needs for the program
- ☐ Developed member outcomes, and plans for recruitment, selection, orientation, training, supervision, support, and retention
- ☐ Begun development of a strategy to measure program impact, including consideration of performance measures and data collection and aggregation plans
- ☐ Developed a volunteer generation plan
- ☐ Developed a program sustainability plan
- ☐ Begun the consultation process with State Commissions of states where you plan to operate your program (not required for Indian Tribes)

By the end of August it is suggested that you have:
- ☐ Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer
- ☐ Secured cash and in-kind donations for the planning grant and begun receiving commitments for the implementation program
- ☐ Developed your plans for organizational capacity, site training plans, monitoring and oversight plans, and program evaluation
- ☐ Developed your plans to demonstrate cost-effectiveness
- ☐ Made significant progress towards identifying your partner sites where members will serve

By the end of September it is suggested that you have:
- ☐ Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer
- ☐ Attended the AmeriCorps State and National Grantee Meeting, including the Program Start-up Institute
- ☐ Developed an updated program budget
- ☐ Completed your community needs statement and efforts to document need
- ☐ Determined member activities and roles and how they align with unmet community need and the outcomes you will measure
- ☐ Completed member recruitment, training and support plan
- ☐ Completed development of a strategy to measure program impact, including performance measures and data collection and aggregation plans

By the end of October it is suggested that you have:
- ☐ Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer
- ☐ Finalized your site selections
- ☐ Completed a site training plan
- ☐ Finalized all program plans
- ☐ Made significant progress securing match for the program

By the end of November it is suggested that you have:
- ☐ Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer

☐   Completed at least one draft of your application
☐   Received feedback on your application from stakeholders

By the end of December it is suggested that you have:
☐   Had at least 2 more check-in calls with your program officer
☐   Completed another draft of your application
☐   Begun to input your application into eGrants

By the end of February it is suggested that you have:
☐   Submitted your grant application (Due January)
☐   Begun working on forms and templates to support program implementation (member contract, memo of agreement with sites, member timesheet, eligibility form, etc.)
☐   Begun preparing your systems for program implementation (payroll, financial management, time tracking, monitoring and oversight tools, program evaluation tools, etc.)
☐   Begun working on an AmeriCorps policies and procedures manual for your program
☐   Developed detailed member orientation, training curricula

By the end of April it is suggested that you have:
☐   Completed work on forms and templates to support program implementation (member contract, memo of agreement with sites, member timesheet, eligibility form, etc.)
☐   Finished preparing your systems for program implementation (payroll, financial management, time tracking, monitoring and oversight tools, program evaluation tools, etc.)
☐   Developed an AmeriCorps policies and procedures manual for your program
☐   Developed detailed member orientation, training curricula

Additional Resources for Planning Grantees

- 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 grant, view sample forms from other programs, take online tutorials to sharpen your skills, and much more.
- The following pages are especially helpful:
  - Learning Pathways for Program Start-Up http://nationalserviceresources.org/program-start-up
  - The EnCorps Collection – tools for member management http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/index.php
  - Performance Measurement Resources http://nationalserviceresources.org/star/ac
  - Take AmeriCorps program management training e-courses: My Improvement Plan, Financial Management, Preparing an AmeriCorps Budget, and AmeriCorps 101 (AmeriCorps basic information). These courses are available at: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/online-courses
  - Review sample AmeriCorps program forms at: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/sample-forms (These forms have not been vetted by CNCS for compliance)
  - Join the AmeriCorps listserv and other national service listservs. Information is available at http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/email-lists
  - To find out about upcoming conferences and trainings, please visit: http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/calendar

- o Visit the AmeriCorps website frequently. http://www.AmeriCorps.gov

Closing
We hope that this document helps you during the planning grant period to develop an infrastructure to support a strong, effective and sustainable AmeriCorps program!

If you have suggestions to improve this document for the benefit of other planning grantees, 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 planning period.

We are excited that you have join our network of AmeriCorps grantees. We wish you much success during your planning year with AmeriCorps!