
Program Directors Guide



2011

Program Directors Guide

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KEY DISTINCTIONS, DEFINITIONS, AND ACRONYMS

AmeriCorps – An umbrella term that refers to programs that are designated by the Corporation as national service programs and the participants in them. AmeriCorps includes AmeriCorps*State/National, AmeriCorps*VISTA, and AmeriCorps*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps).

AmeriCorps Members – should not be called *volunteers, workers, staff, participants, or employees*. The word *member* is lowercase.

AmeriCorps National Service Network – refers to all of the programs affiliated with AmeriCorps—including AmeriCorps*NCCC, AmeriCorps*VISTA, AmeriCorps*State and National, AmeriCorps*Tribes and Territories, the AmeriCorps Education Awards Program, AmeriCorps.

AmeriCorps*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) – A residential AmeriCorps program in which 18-24-year-old-members are housed and trained together on military bases and deployed in teams to service sites throughout the surrounding region.

AmeriCorps*State and National – Used only when referring to grants or funding, AmeriCorps*State grants are distributed through the state commissions; AmeriCorps*National grants are distributed to organizations directly from the national office of the Corporation for National Service.

AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) – Full-time, national service program for men and women ages 18 and older interested in developing lasting solutions to the problems of poverty in America. AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations and agencies to develop permanent infrastructure that aids and expands services, strengthens programs, and empowers low income individuals. AmeriCorps*VISTA is under the AmeriCorps umbrella and is administered out of the Corporation’s State Offices.

Audit – To examine with intent to verify, usually regarding financial accounts.

Campus Compact – A national organization of college and university presidents with numerous state affiliates committed to advancing service on their campuses.

Citizen – A person who owes allegiance to and is entitled to the enjoyment of full rights in the United State, either by birth or naturalization.

Community-based Organization (CBO) – Any private non-profit organization (including a church or other religious entity) that is representative of a community or a significant segment of a community; and is engaged in meeting, human, environmental, or public safety community needs.

Consortia – A group of organizations whose purpose is to collectively facilitate and support the work of a service program in ways that add material and human resources beyond those available to each organization individually.

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) – The independent federal agency that encompasses the work and staff of two previously existing agencies, the Commission on National and Community Service and ACTION. The Corporation was created by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993.

Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 – The Domestic Volunteer Service Act authorizes AmeriCorps*VISTA, the Foster Grandparent Program, the Senior Companion Program, and the RSVP program. The legislation was last amended in 1993 as part of the creation of the Corporation for Nation Service.

Education Award – A post-service benefit earned by all AmeriCorps successfully completing a term of service. The award is paid directly to a lending or educational institution and may be used to pay off education loans or to finance college, graduate school, or approved vocational training.

Education Award Program - An AmeriCorps program that receives a small administrative grant and use their own or other resources to pay the members' living allowance and support program costs

eGrants – Online system for submitting grant applications.

Evaluation – A formal external assessment of program effectiveness and outcomes at the end of a given period of time. Evaluation is primarily the responsibility of the Corporation and is conducted by the Corporation with the cooperation of state commissions and programs.

Fiscal Year – A period of 12 months during which a particular budget is to be spent and accounted for. The Federal Fiscal Year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The Montana State Fiscal Year begins July 1 and ends on June 30.

Formula Funding – The annual allotment given to each state against which the state commissions solicits proposals for AmeriCorps funding.

Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) – One of the three National Senior Service Corps programs. Foster Grandparents devote their service to children with special or exceptional needs.

Grantee – The direct recipient of a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

In the AmeriCorps State model the **Grantee** is the state commission. AmeriCorps funds are granted directly to the state commission and subgranted to AmeriCorps Programs. Ultimately the grantee is responsible for ensuring that AmeriCorps funds are used appropriately.

A **Host Site** is where an AmeriCorps member performs the majority of their service. The responsibilities of the host site will vary between programs but will likely include oversight to ensure member activities are allowable, and the tracking of member hours.

In-kind – Contributions and donations made in services and projects, not cash.

Learn and Serve America – Service-learning programs that are designed to enrich academic learning and promote growth in participants while meeting community needs. There are two categories of Learn and Serve America programs: K-12 and Higher Education. Learn and Serve America: K-12 has two main components: *school-based*, which includes formula allotment grants to State Education Agencies, and *community-based*, which are distributed on a competitive basis to state commissions, grant making entities, and other qualified organizations. (*See service-learning.*)

Living Allowance – AmeriCorps members receive a modest living allowance during their term of service. This is a benefit in addition to the education award available to members who successfully complete their term of service (*See stipend.*)

AmeriCorps members earn a **Living Allowance** - not a salary or wage.

Matching Funds – State commissions themselves, as well as the programs they fund, are required to meet certain specified match requirements as a condition for receipt of federal funding. For every dollar of federal funds, there is a designated percentage of case of in-kind funds that the state commission or other organizations must provide (this is the “match”).

Members – Participants in AmeriCorps (including AmeriCorps*NCCC, AmeriCorps*VISTA, and AmeriCorps*State and National programs) are referred to as members – not volunteers.

Mission Statement – A mission statement expresses the program's vision with regard to national service and indicates the ultimate impacts to be achieved. A program's annual objectives are derived from the program's mission statement.

National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 – The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 created AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National Service. The act authorizes appropriations for AmeriCorps*State and National, AmeriCorps*NCCC, Learn and Serve America, the National Service Trust, and the Points of Light Foundation. The 1993 legislation amended the National and Community Service Act of 1990.

National Competitive Funding – An annual pool of funds against which state commissions may compete to fund additional AmeriCorps programs in their states.

National Directs (AmeriCorps*National) – AmeriCorps programs funded directly by the Corporation through multi-state non-profit organizations.

National Senior Service Corps (NSSC) – The umbrella term that encompasses the three senior service programs: Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

National Service – Results-oriented service by an individual or group of individuals that help meet the nation’s needs in the areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs.

National Service and Community Service - refers to any of the programs affiliated with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

NCCC – See AmeriCorps*NCCC

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – A legal notification, published in the Federal Register, describing the availability of funds for a new federal program.

Participant – The generic term used to describe any individual enrolled in a program funded by the Corporation, as opposed to the more specific term “member,” which refers to individuals enrolled in an AmeriCorps program.

Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future – This historic gathering in Philadelphia in April 1997 at which former Presidents Clinton, Bush , Carter, and Ford, and Secretary of State Colin Powell called for all Americans to find ways to ensure that all children have access to the fundamental resources they need:

- caring adults in their lives, as parents, mentors, tutors, and coaches;
- safe places with structured activities in which to learn and grow;
- a healthy start and healthy future;
- an effective education that equips them with marketable skills; and
- an opportunity to give back through their communities through their own service.

Program – A coordinated group of activities linked by common elements such as recruitment, selection, and training of participants, and staff, regular group activities, and assignment to projects organized for the purpose of achieving the mission and goals of national service, and carried out with the assistance provided under the Act.

The **Program/Subgrantee** is the organization to which funds are subgranted. The program is responsible for oversight of the AmeriCorps program and the appropriate management of federal funds, but may not necessarily oversee the day to day activities of AmeriCorps Members.

Program Development Assistance and Training (PDAT) – Funds provided to state commissions to enable them to provide training and technical assistance support to their programs.

Program Sponsor – An entity responsible for recruiting, selecting and training members, providing them benefits and support services, engaging them in regular group activities and placing them in projects.

Project – An activity, or set of activities, carried out through a program that receives assistance under the Act, that results in a specific identifiable service or improvement that otherwise would not be done with existing

funds, and that does not duplicate the routine services or functions of the employer to whom participants are assigned.

Project Sponsor – An organization, or other entity, that has been selected to provide a placement for a participant or participants.

Partnership – Two or more entities that have entered into a written agreement specifying the goals and activities of the relationship as well as the responsibilities, goals, and activities of each partner.

PSA – Public Service Announcement.

Request for Proposals (RFP) – A term which some states or organizations use to describe the document which they solicit proposals from other organizations. Others may call such as document a grant application or bid. State commissions will use RFP's for AmeriCorps programs from non-profit organizations, local governments, higher education institution, Indian Tribes, and state agencies.

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) - One of the three National Senior Service Corps programs that was created 1972.

SEA – State Education Agency. (*See Learn and Serve America.*)

Senior Companion Program (SCP) - One of three National Senior Service Corps programs. Senior Companions help other seniors live independently in their own homes and receive a stipend.

Service-Learning – A method by which students improve academic learning and develop personal skills through structured service projects that meet community needs. Service-learning builds upon students' service activities by providing them with opportunities to learn by preparing, leading, and reflecting upon their service experiences. (*See Learn and Serve America.*)

Service Recipient – a community beneficiary who receives a service or benefit from the service of AmeriCorps members.

Signature Service – A project undertaken by a large group of participants often from many different programs and usually in conjunction with a special day to highlight service programs and their participants, such as Martin Luther King Day or National Youth Service Day.

State Commission – A 15-25 member, independent, bipartisan body appointed by a Governor to implement service programs. Duties of a State Commission include development of a comprehensive Unified State Plan for service and volunteering in the state; submission of the state's application to the Corporation for AmeriCorps and community-based Learn and Serve funding; administration of the competition for AmeriCorps*State programs; oversight and monitoring of funded AmeriCorps and community-based Learn and Serve programs, and reporting accomplishments to the Corporation.

State Service Plan (SSP) – A three-year plan developed by each state commission in partnership with the Corporation State Office, the State Education Agency, and other appropriate organizations in the state. The State Service Plan should describe the broad vision for promoting national service and volunteering and for building a solid infrastructure of high quality programs and support services in the state.

Stipend – A cash benefit that is an alternative to the education award – an option only for AmeriCorps*VISTA members. The term is not synonymous with living allowance. (*See living allowance.*)

Streams of Service – A term used to refer to the many types of service programs, for example, the "K-12 service stream," or the "full time service stream."

Streams of Service – refer to the three major national service programs under CNCS, AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America and Senior Corps (Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP).

AmeriCorps members serve through the AmeriCorps program, they *do not* work for AmeriCorps or the program and they are not employees.

Service-Learning – is an educational method that engages young people in service to their communities as a means of enriching academic learning, promoting personal growth, and helping them to develop the skills needed for productive citizenship” (Dunlap, N.C., Drew, S.F. and Gibson, K. (1994) *Serving to Learn: K-8 Manual*. Columbia, S.C: South Carolina Department of Education).

Student Ownership – The notion that students can make important contributions to their schools and communities.

USA Freedom Corps – include AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, Peace Corps, and Citizen Corps.

VISTA – See AmeriCorps*VISTA.

Youth Civic Engagement – The process of engaging youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues in their communities.

Youth Service – The involvement of young people in providing services to their schools and/or communities. This term should not be confused with “youth services, “which typically refers to programs where youth are the recipients of service.

Chapter One

Introduction, History, and Structure

Introduction

This manual does not supersede any of the requirements established by the terms, conditions, and provisions of an AmeriCorps grant or contract, or requirements applicable to all federal grants. Likewise, the information contained in this resource manual does not include all the legal requirements of an AmeriCorps grant, nor does it constitute CNCS' official definitive interpretation of the law, regulations, and policies related to AmeriCorps programs. Rather, it is intended as a resource guide to help program staff establish and maintain sound operations in compliance with federal and state statutes, regulations, provisions, and policies. To find AmeriCorps policy documents go to: http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp

A Brief History of National Service

When faced with challenges, our nation has always relied on the dedication and action of its citizens. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) carries on a long tradition of citizen involvement by providing opportunities for Americans of all ages to improve their communities through service.

The Civilian Conservation Corps

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. Four million young people joined in response to his call to service, restoring the nation's parks, revitalizing the economy, and supporting their families and themselves. For 11 years the Civilian Conservation Corps provided billions of dollars in services and enabled millions of families to live in dignity.

The GI Bill

During the 1940's, the GI Bill linked wartime service to educational benefits, offering returning World War II veterans the opportunity to pursue higher education in partial compensation for service to their country. Veterans improved their own lives by attending college. They also contributed mightily to America's future. With the education they received, those citizens helped spark the economic boom that helped make America the world's leading economy.

Peace Corps

In the 1960s the call to service came from President John F. Kennedy, who challenged Americans in his inaugural address "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." In response to this challenge, the Peace Corps was born. The Peace Corps continues to engage thousands of volunteers who travel the world far and wide, building schools where none existed, helping farmers provide food for the hungry, and creating hospitals to care for the sick. After

returning from overseas, Peace Corps volunteers put their new knowledge of others to work at home, in the spirit of citizenship, changing America for the better.

The War on Poverty

President Lyndon B. Johnson brought the spirit of the Peace Corps home to America by creating Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in 1964. VISTA, which is now part of AmeriCorps, continues to fund programs under the sponsorship of local public agencies or nonprofit organizations to improve the condition of people living in under-served, low-income communities throughout America. Other initiatives such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Corps (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program were developed in order to engage older Americans in the work of improving the nation.

Revival of Interest National and Community Service

President George H. W. Bush helped spark a revival of interest in national service when he instituted the White House Office of National Service in 1989. In 1990 Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which created a Commission on National and Community Service whose mission was to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States.” Full implementation began in 1992, when the commission awarded \$64 million in grants to support four broad types of state and local community service efforts. These initiatives were the Serve-America programs (now Learn and Serve) which involved school-aged youth in community service and service-learning through a variety of school and community-based activities; Higher Education Innovative Projects aimed at involving college students in community service and at promoting community service at educational institutions; American Conservation and Youth Service Corps, supporting summer and year-round youth corps initiatives that engage both in- and out-of-school youth in community service work; and the National and Community Service Demonstration Models, for programs that were potential models for large-scale national service. The National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), a demonstration program to help solve problems here at home, was enacted later as part of the 1993 Defense Authorization Act. It is a residential service program modeled on the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States military.

National and Community Service Trust Act

President Bill Clinton sponsored the National and Community Service Trust Act, a revision of the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which was passed by a bipartisan coalition of members of Congress and signed into law on September 21, 1993. The legislation created a new federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), to administer federally-funded national service programs. The law created AmeriCorps, which was designed to support local, state, and national organizations across the nation, involves Americans in results-driven community service. The legislation drew on the principles of both the Civilian Conservation Corps and the GI Bill, encouraging Americans to serve and rewarding those who do. The new agency also took over management of the programs of two previous agencies, ACTION, which was responsible for running VISTA and the National Senior Service Corps programs, and the more recent Commission on National and Community Service, including the NCCC, forming a new network of national service programs.

Service in the New Millennium

President George W. Bush called on all Americans to serve their country for the equivalent of two years and announced the creation of the USA Freedom Corps, an umbrella network for volunteerism. A coordinating council housed at the White House and chaired by the President is working to expand and strengthen federal service programs like the Peace Corps, Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps, and to raise awareness of and break down barriers to service opportunities within all federal government agencies.

The Serve America Act

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The Serve America Act reauthorized and expanded national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service by amending the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

Organizational Structure

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

Created in 1993, The Corporation for National and Community Service supports service at the national, state and local levels, overseeing three main initiatives:

- AmeriCorps – whose members serve with local and national organization to meet community needs and after service receive education awards to help finance college or training (AmeriCorps*State and National, AmeriCorps*VISTA and AmeriCorps*NCCC)
- Learn and Serve – which provides support to schools, higher education institutions and community-based organizations, that engage students, their teachers, and others in service-learning.; and
- Senior Corps, through which Americans 55 and older contribute their skills and experience (RSVP, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions)

AmeriCorps operates in a decentralized manner that gives a significant amount of administrative responsibility to states and national and local nonprofit groups. CNCS realizes that the many organizations and individuals around the country with which it shares administrative responsibility for AmeriCorps will look to it for assistance on a broad range of issues and problems.

The following table suggests some of the principal support functions that the CNCS office can provide:

OFFICE	AmeriCorps SUPPORT FUNCTIONS
Program	Oversees programmatic aspects of grants and awards. Program officers serve as the primary liaisons with state service commission and the National Program grantees.
Grants	Oversees financial aspects of grants and awards.
Office of Leadership Development and Training	Works with national technical assistance providers and with training and technical assistance coordinators in state service commissions.
Trust	Manages the education awards for AmeriCorps members.
Public Affairs	Oversees media relations, marketing and publications, including the online recruitment website.
Public Liaison	Oversees national initiatives, national service days, and all AmeriCorps awards.
General Counsel	Provides legal counsel for CNCS and can answer legal questions related to AmeriCorps program management.
Office of the Inspector General	Detects and deters waste, fraud, abuse, and violations of law of CNCS funded programs.

CNCS State Offices

CNCS also operates offices in each state. These offices are responsible for administering AmeriCorps*VISTA projects as well as the three Senior Corps programs. The state office director usually serves as an ex-officio member of the State Service Commission.

For a list of CNCS State officers and contact information, please go to:

<http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>

Montana Commission on Community Service

The Montana Office of Community Service seeks to renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the state by:

- Encouraging the citizens of the state, regardless of age or income, to engage in full-time or part time service to the state
- Call young people to serve in projects that will benefit the state and improve their life chances through the acquisition of literacy, job skills, and interpersonal skills
- Build on the existing organizational framework of state and local governmental entities to expand full-time and part-time service opportunities in a wide variety of programs for all citizens, particularly youth and older Montanans
- Involve participants in activities that would not otherwise be performed by employed workers
- Establish programs to accomplish labor-intensive improvements to public or low-income properties or to provide services for the benefit of the state, its communities, and its people through service contracts that specify the work to be performed

The Commission is a diverse, non-partisan, and Governor appointed body representing a broad cross-section of community service interests and statewide leadership in Montana. The Commission's administrative arm, the Governor's Office of Community Service (OCS), is a state agency funded by

the Corporation for National and Community Service and the State of Montana. OCS serves as an independent non-partisan commission which assumes responsibility for the distribution and expenditure of funds related to AmeriCorps*State programs.

For a list of State Service Commissions and their contact information, please go to: <http://www.americorps.gov/about/contact/statecommission.asp>.

State Education Agencies

State education agencies (SEAs) receive and administer the school-based Learn and Serve funds. These monies are distributed to SEAs on a formula basis and support service-learning activities for K-12. States have significant latitude in how they design their programs. For example, some states offer large grants for district-wide implementation of service-learning. Other states offer smaller grants to individual schools, classrooms, or teachers. Unlike AmeriCorps, SEAs apply for funding for service-learning and then decide which programs/districts to fund through a competitive process that occurs after the fact. Funds support both the implementation and capacity-building of service-learning. SEAs are responsible for monitoring, reporting, and training the CNCS-funded service-learning programs they administer.

AmeriCorps Programs

*AmeriCorps*VISTA*

Members serve low-income communities and families across the country. Members of AmeriCorps*VISTA work and live in the communities they serve, creating or expanding programs that can continue after they complete their service. AmeriCorps*VISTA members are assigned to local project sponsors and focus on building community capacity, mobilizing community resources and increasing self-reliance.

*AmeriCorps*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps)*

NCCC is a 10-month full-time residential program operated directly by the Corporation. AmeriCorps*NCCC combines the best practices of civilian service with the best practices of military service, including leadership development and team-building. Members live and train at campuses located in; Denver, CO; Perry Point, MD; Sacramento, CA; and Vinton, IA. AmeriCorps*NCCC conducts service projects in partnership with local and state sponsors.

*AmeriCorps*State and National*

AmeriCorps State

AmeriCorps*State works with Governor-appointed State Service Commissions to provide grants to public and nonprofit organizations that sponsor service programs around the country, including hundreds of faith-based and community organizations, higher education institutions, and public agencies. Grants assist these groups in recruiting, training and placing AmeriCorps members to meet critical community needs.

AmeriCorps*National

AmeriCorps*National provides grants directly to public and non-profit organizations that sponsor service programs, Indian tribes, and consortia formed across two or more states, including faith-

based and community organizations, higher education institutions, and public agencies. Grants assist these groups in recruiting, training and placing AmeriCorps members to meet critical community needs in Disaster Services, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity, and Veterans and Military Families.

Chapter Two

AmeriCorps Grants

There are two streams of AmeriCorps State funding for which this manual is tailored. The two funding types are formula funding, which is awarded at the state level, and competitive funding, which is awarded at the national level. Formula funding is awarded directly to state commissions for the funding of AmeriCorps programs based on a population based formula. Competitive funding is also awarded to commissions but final funding decisions are made at the national level. The decision of whether an application is submitted at the competitive level is given to the state commission and is primarily based on the strength of the application and applying organization. Whether it is a competitive or formula grant, awards are made for three year cycles renewed at the end of years one and two with an abbreviated “continuation” application. As a general rule of the Montana commission any program completing their second three year cycle under formula funding will be required to apply for competitive funds.

In general the purpose of an AmeriCorps state grants is to “initiate, improve, or expand the ability of an organization and community to provide services to address local unmet environmental, educational, public safety (including disaster preparedness and response), or other human needs”. Additionally, competitive, and sometimes formula, funds are available for planning grants which will fund one year of work toward an organization developing an AmeriCorps program.

Service Activities and Use of Grant Funds

Eligible Activities (45 C.F.R. 2520)

The first key to determining the eligibility of a member activity is whether it falls within the priority areas identified by CNCS: Disaster Services, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity, and Veterans and Military Families. It is the responsibility of an applicant for an AmeriCorps grant to demonstrate that one or more of the priority areas are being met in a proposal, or in grant activities. Within each of the priority areas AmeriCorps members can provide *direct service* and/or *capacity building* activities that initiate improve or expand the capacity of an organization and community to provide services.

Direct service activities refer generally to activities that provide a direct, measurable benefit to an individual, a group, or a community. Some examples are

- ★ Tutoring children in reading
- ★ Engaging in community clean-up projects
- ★ Providing health information to vulnerable populations
- ★ Providing relief services to an area affected by disaster

Capacity building activities advance an organizations mission and are included in, or consistent with, the approved grant application. Examples of capacity building activities are:

- ★ Strengthening volunteer management and recruitment, including:
- ★ Conducting outreach and securing resources in support of service activities that meet specific needs in the community;
- ★ Helping build the infrastructure of the sponsoring organization, including:
- ★ Developing collaborative relationships with other organizations working to achieve similar goals in the community, such as:
- ★ Community organizations, including faith-based organizations; foundations; local government agencies; institutions of higher education; and local education agencies or organizations.

Ineligible Service Categories, Activities and Uses of Grant Funds

While certain activity may qualify as direct service or capacity building and fit one of the needs areas there are specific activities which members and grant funded staff may not participate in. Also, there are specific types of organizations whose mission may fit the eligibility criteria but are expressly prohibited from receiving funding under AmeriCorps provisions. This section is intended to provide a general outline, for full descriptions of the topics discussed in this section refer directly to AmeriCorps legislation. http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/history.asp

Prohibited Activities

While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or the Corporation, staff and members may not engage in the following activities (see 45 CFR § 2520.65):

- a) Attempting to influence legislation;
- b) Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- c) Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- d) Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- e) Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- f) f. Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;
- g) g. Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- h) Providing a direct benefit to—
 - a. A business organized for profit;
 - b. A labor union;
 - c. A partisan political organization;
 - d. A nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and
 - e. An organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (g) of this section, unless Corporation assistance is not used to support those religious activities;

- i) Conducting a voter registration drive or using Corporation funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- j) Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services; and
- k) Such other activities as the Corporation may prohibit.

AmeriCorps members may not engage in the above activities directly or indirectly by recruiting, training, or managing others for the primary purpose of engaging in one of the activities listed above. Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the activities listed above on their initiative, on non-AmeriCorps time, and using non-Corporation funds. Individuals should not wear the AmeriCorps logo while doing so.

Nonduplication and Nondisplacement (42 U.S.C. 12584a)

- ★ **NONDUPLICATION**— Assistance provided under the national service laws shall be used only for a program that does not duplicate, and is in addition to, an activity otherwise available in the locality of such program.
- ★ **PRIVATE NONPROFIT ENTITY**— Assistance made available under the national service laws shall not be provided to a private nonprofit entity to conduct activities that are the same or substantially equivalent to activities provided by a State or local government agency that such entity resides unless nondisplacement requirements are met.
- ★ **NONDISPLACEMENT**— An employer shall not displace an employee, position, or volunteer (other than a participant under the national service laws), including partial displacement such as reduction in hours, wages, or employment benefits, as a result of the use by such employer of a participant in a program receiving assistance under the national service laws.

Other Requirements

Insurance Coverage

Programs must provide to the Office of Community Service proof of general liability insurance and motor vehicle both with policy limit amounts meeting the requirements of the program subagreement. Members engaged in both on- and off-site project activities must be covered. You should review your current policies to ensure they cover non-employees in special statuses, such as members. Generally insurance costs are an allowable expense and may be charged to the grant as an administrative cost on a pro-rated basis or included in program match. If insurance is included in the approved budget, insurance purchased specifically for the AmeriCorps program it may be charged as a direct program cost.

Disability Inclusion

Accommodating Members with Disabilities

You are urged to reach out to members who can contribute a diverse set of perceptions, skills, and life experiences to the program team.

In all cases, your selection process must be based on the qualifications of the applicants and whether or not they can perform the essential project activities, with or without reasonable accommodation

of their mental or physical disabilities. Programs and activities must be accessible to persons with disabilities, and you must provide reasonable accommodation to the known mental or physical disabilities of otherwise qualified members, service recipients, applicants, and program staff.

You must make all selections and project assignments without regard to the need to provide reasonable accommodation. You are not asked to enroll individuals who are unqualified or who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others [that cannot be eliminated through reasonable accommodation], nor are you required to make accommodations that are unduly burdensome or will alter your program design fundamentally. However, you must prove and document any such findings or decisions.

Once an individual requests an accommodation, you should evaluate your ability to provide that accommodation. The first step is to talk to the person – find out what functional limitations exist and what essential functions need to be accomplished or what barrier exists to participation in the program or activity.

In many cases individuals will know what they need and how to secure it. In some cases, individuals will not be certain what they will need. There are several resources that you can call upon to assist you and the individual in evaluating appropriate and effective accommodations.

It is always a good idea to contact technical assistance resources when an individual requests an accommodation that involves getting or modifying equipment, or involves structural changes. There are resources that are expertly qualified to assist you.

- ★ ServeMontana. http://serve.mt.gov/?page_id=2961
- ★ The National Service Inclusion Project is a CNCS funded technical assistance provider that can assist you. www.serviceandinclusion.org
- ★ The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is another excellent resource that is available to you at no cost. JAN can be reached at (800) 526-7234 (voice/TTY). <http://askjan.org/>
- ★ Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are federally funded and located across the country and can provide you with assistance.

These resources are knowledgeable of effective, efficient accommodations. Often they can identify accommodations that are far less costly and often more effective than persons who are not experts in accommodation can identify.

Providing accommodations: Financial or administrative burden

In a few cases, you may receive requests for accommodations that you believe are unduly disruptive to your program or are too expensive. Under the Rehabilitation Act and the terms of your grant or agreement with the Corporation, you must provide accommodation, upon request by a qualified individual with disabilities, unless doing so is an undue financial or administrative burden to your program. This is a very high standard. Not being easily achievable does not meet this standard. Being difficult to achieve, time-consuming, or costly, do not meet this standard.

In addition, there are many factors that go into evaluating the obligation to provide accommodations.

Undue administrative burden means the accommodation will alter the fundamental nature of your program. For example, adjustment of hours is often a form of reasonable accommodation. However, you must carefully consider the circumstances and the legal requirements when adjusting hours for participants. AmeriCorps State/National programs have statutory requirements regarding service hours, and changes to hours that violate these requirements "alter the fundamental nature of the program." Therefore, these changes are not required for reasonable accommodation and providing them may violate the Corporation's statute.

You must first determine if your program has consistently applied these requirements to all your participants. Strict adherence to the legal requirements to deny a person an accommodation for his or her disability when flexibility is allowed for others is discrimination because of disability.

If consistently applied, the following scenarios would alter the fundamental nature of the program:

1. a full-time AmeriCorps State/National/NCCC member who is not required to serve 1700 (or a higher minimum established by the program);
2. an AmeriCorps VISTA who is not available for service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the same manner as other AmeriCorps VISTAs at that site or within that state; and
3. an AmeriCorps member who extends the time within which to complete the requisite number of hours. NOTE: There are ways to work around a fundamental alteration in the 12month completion requirement. If a person with a disability needs time off for extensive medical treatments, hospitalization, etc. or is unable to serve full time for a period, options are:
 - ★ They can be put on a non-disciplinary suspension for the period, with that time added to the end of the current service period. This allows the person to complete the full term of service and obtain the education award. It makes no difference if this puts their completion date after the end of the grant cycle. However, the participant cannot receive a living allowance during this period.
 - ★ There may be circumstances under which they can be converted to part-time status. This is dependent on program design and may affect the individual's member benefits.
 - ★ They can be released for compelling personal circumstances. This allows them to receive a prorated education award.

Undue financial burden considers many factors, including:

1. The overall size of your entire organization (not just your national service or volunteer program) – number of employees and participants; number and type of facilities; and size of budget.
 - a. The type of your operation, including the composition and structure of your entire organization's work force and service force.
 - b. The nature and cost of the accommodation needed.

In all cases, if you fail to provide a reasonable accommodation when requested by a qualified individual with disabilities and claim undue burden, the onus is on you to fully justify your undue burden claim.

In some cases, there are funds available from the State Commissions to assist you in paying for accommodations. These funds may not be used to assist you in meeting basic accessibility and accommodation requirements, but they can be used to make your program more accessible than the minimum requirements mandate. Therefore, if providing an accommodation would be an undue financial burden for your organization, these funds may be available. Contact your State Commission Disability Coordinator for more information.

AmeriCorps Progress Reports (APR)

AmeriCorps programs are required to submit AmeriCorps Progress Reports semiannually and planning grants quarterly. Progress reports monitor a program's progress toward meeting program performance measures, assess program strengths and challenges, and highlight unique program/member achievements as well as any other reporting required by the Governor's Office of Community Service. At a minimum, programs must ensure that:

- All questions are answered;
- program impact is clearly stated;
- challenges are clearly outlined; and
- measures to address challenges, improve the program, and/or comply with federal laws and regulations are clearly identified.

Chapter Three

Affiliation, Recruitment, and Benefits

AmeriCorps Affiliation

AmeriCorps program provisions dictate that, “the grantee must identify the program as an AmeriCorps program and members eligible for an education award as AmeriCorps members.” This does not mean that “AmeriCorps” must be in the name of the program, but simply that the program must identify itself as being associated with AmeriCorps.

Further, “[t]o establish the relationship between the program and AmeriCorps, the grantee should use the phrase ‘The AmeriCorps National Service Network’ or ‘an AmeriCorps program’ or ‘a proud member of the AmeriCorps national service network’”.

One last preliminary note is that donors to local programs may not use the AmeriCorps name or logo in advertising or other promotional materials without the written permission of the Corporation. Permission may be withheld if recognition of the donor is inconsistent with the Corporation’s policies and objectives.

Ethic of Service

The centerpiece of the AmeriCorps ethic is “getting things done”, strengthening communities and developing members’ opportunities and civic responsibility. To help create an esprit de corps for members, programs are encouraged to plan on the basis of “classes” of members who begin and “graduate” from their terms of service.

Orientation sessions for your staff, site supervisors and members should include a discussion on the national scope of AmeriCorps and an explanation of how your local program fits in to the AmeriCorps network. Appropriate opening ceremonies, including the administration of the AmeriCorps Pledge, are important for all members. Programs should also arrange for members to participate in other joint activities such as service days (such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service) and conferences arranged by state commissions or by the Corporation.

Logos

Camera-ready logos are available from the AmeriCorps media center and can be downloaded for use from the Corporation’s website at: http://www.americorps.gov/about/media_kit/logos.asp

In order to preserve the AmeriCorps identity, you must obtain written permission from the Corporation if you wish to:

- use the AmeriCorps name or logo on materials that will be sold;
- use the AmeriCorps name or logo on clothing not worn by members or alumni;
- alter the AmeriCorps logo or use it as a part of any other logo or design; or

allow a donor to use the AmeriCorps name or logo in promotional material.

Service Gear and Other promotional

For a program to identify themselves with AmeriCorps (except Education Award only Programs (EAP)) “must use the AmeriCorps name and logo on service gear and public materials such as stationery, application forms, recruitment brochures, on-line position posting or other recruitment strategies, orientation materials, member curriculum, signs, banners, press releases and publications related to their AmeriCorps members”. Approved AmeriCorps gear can be ordered on-line at: <http://www.nationalservicegear.org/>.

Except for safety equipment, grantees may only charge the cost of member service gear to the federal share if it includes the AmeriCorps logo. Grantees may also add the AmeriCorps logo to their own local program uniform items using federal funds. All safety gear may be charged to the federal share, regardless of whether it includes the AmeriCorps logo. All other service gear must be purchased with non-federal funds.

Promoting Your Program

Every year, thousands of stories about Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America appear in the media – almost all generated by local project staff and volunteers. Publicizing your program is not a goal in itself, it is a means of building support for your program and increasing your likelihood of success. Taking the time to communicate with the public helps attract resources from your community, including volunteers, sponsors, and funding, and helps educate people about your program. You don't have to be a media pro to get good coverage, but having some tips and resources can help. Check out this site: http://www.americorps.gov/about/media_kit/index.asp

In addition to AmeriCorps service gear, there are many other ways in which the common look and affiliation may be advanced by programs. (Some of these items may be purchased with grant money.)

- Members should identify themselves as AmeriCorps members and describe AmeriCorps appropriately.

- Signs should identify sites as AmeriCorps project sites.

- Program staff should be able to discuss AmeriCorps with visitors.

- Stationery, brochures, fax cover sheets, and newsletters can identify the program as AmeriCorps, including the use of the logo.

- Your community should be aware that the members are AmeriCorps members.

- Press releases and other public materials should note that the program is part of the AmeriCorps national service network.

In addition to the many publications available from the Corporation for National and Community Service (such as handbooks, manuals, recruitment and marketing materials), local programs often develop their own materials. To let others know of your affiliation with AmeriCorps, you may want to use the AmeriCorps name and logo in your publications. Publications that are distributed externally must include the following acknowledgment and disclaimer:

“This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service under AmeriCorps Grant No. _____. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of AmeriCorps or the Corporation for National and Community Service.”

AmeriCorps Recruitment

This section is intended to give you some basic strategies that you can adapt to recruit members from your community and information on how you can tap into the national pool of applicants. More detailed information is available at:

http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/members/index.asp

Whether you recruit locally or nationally, you are encouraged to target your recruitment activities to as many audiences as are appropriate. Diversity is important in recruitment, and can be represented in many ways: age, gender, sexual orientation, economic, education background, race and ethnicity, skills, and physical abilities.

First, take some time to plan your general recruitment strategy, which should include:

- position descriptions for your members;
- a list of target groups that may be able to fill the positions; and
- ways to make sure that your target groups are aware of your organization and the positions available.

Developing a Recruiting Message

Once you develop a list of target groups, think of different ways you can market or “sell” your AmeriCorps message to each group. Remember to vary your approach because not all people will respond to the same message. Below are some basic “selling” points:

- appeal of AmeriCorps and service
- give back to your community
- gain job skills and career networks
- travel/meet new people/adventure
- deferment for qualified student loans
- education award to pay off student loans or for post secondary education
- opportunity to apply education and experience to help communities

Target your materials. What would attract an applicant to your program? Applicants want to know what they’ll be doing and what they’ll gain from service as an AmeriCorps member. Target your approach to specific audiences. For example, if your project focuses on education, advertise to education majors the valuable classroom experience that they’ll gain as AmeriCorps members. Ask your current members to comment on your existing materials and give you either formal or informal reactions. Even though you don’t need to incorporate all of their comments you are likely to receive some helpful feedback.

Make it personal. Personal contact makes the difference. Use your alumni (or current members on non-service hours) to attend a state fair, conference, or school career day to share their experiences. Consider holding an information session with the contacts that you've made. Invite your current members, service alumni, and other members in the area to share their experiences and give potential applicants a firsthand account of your program.

Respond quickly and follow up. Keep a record of people you've sent applications to or who have requested further information. Follow up with them with a postcard, phone call, or e-mail to invite them to take the next step. Offer suggestions to them on completing the application.

Collaborate and ask for help. There may be other programs recruiting in your area--check with them and find out how you can combine mailings, or share space at events with other programs. They may even have a list of people they were unable to place who could be perfect for your program. Contact other national service programs and/or branches in your area including National Senior Corps and VISTA.

Create a Network. People often decide to do something because someone they respect or trust has suggested it. Ask local high school counselors, college placement officers, and community leaders to promote AmeriCorps and your program. Again, consider your target audiences and the attraction that your program would hold for them.

Order your materials. Use the AmeriCorps Materials Request Form to order the recruitment materials that you need. http://www.americorps.gov/pdf/ac_materials_request.pdf

Application Form for Members

The Corporation has created a standard application for AmeriCorps, which you are encouraged to use as the application for your program. If you have your own application, you are asked to also to accept the AmeriCorps application from potential candidates who have enrolled on-line using the My AmeriCorps website. If requested, programs must make their forms available in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities. If you need copies of the AmeriCorps application visit:

http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/tta/forms.asp

If your program has its own application form, it may be beneficial to include an area where an individual lists any other AmeriCorps experience. If an individual is selected for a fifth or more term of service not in keeping with Corporation policy and regulations, the program will be liable for any Corporation funds used to support that individual.

National Recruitment Website

<https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do>

My AmeriCorps, the web-based system for the recruitment and placement of AmeriCorps members, allows individuals to learn about AmeriCorps programs throughout the country, to search for programs based on selected criteria and to apply on-line. It allows programs to search for individuals

based on the same select criteria and to contact these individuals via e-mail. Programs may also receive and approve applications on-line.

The *My AmeriCorps* system is designed to generate interest in serving in AmeriCorps, to simplify the application process and to increase customer service to program staff and to potential applicants. A procedure is in place for potential members without internet access to become users by means of contract staff available via the toll-free number (800) 942-2677.

To assist you in reaching a national pool of potential members, you can list your program opportunities and select applicants online. The grants management and recruiting system are both in one place; you can access the recruitment system through <https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp>.

New to AmeriCorps

You will need to register to get an account as a Grantee. Then you are ready to begin posting opportunities, searching for applicants based on your needs, contacting applicants, reviewing applications and selecting your volunteers. More specific instructions are available at:

http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/members/index.asp

Member orientation (AmeriCorps Grant Provisions FAQ)

The grantee must conduct an orientation for members designed to enhance member security and sensitivity to the community. Orientation should cover member rights and responsibilities, including the Program's code of conduct, prohibited activities (including those specified in the regulations), requirements under the Drug-Free Workplace Act (41 U.S.C. 701 *et seq.*), suspension and termination from service, grievance procedures, sexual harassment, other non-discrimination issues, and additional topics as necessary.

Core topics for initial member orientation should include, at a minimum:

- National service: the big picture
- An overview of the history and nationwide importance of national service including:
 - ★ The history of service in America
 - ★ A discussion of the AmeriCorps ethic
 - ★ The meaning of community
 - ★ The doors of opportunity that will open through service
 - ★ The responsibilities that individuals have to themselves, their families, their community, and the nation
- Program rules, regulations, and benefits (provide member program manual)
 - ★ Drug Free Workplace Act Sexual harassment and other discrimination issues
 - ★ Grievance procedure
 - ★ Safety protocol
 - ★ Prohibited activities
 - ★ Rules of conduct

- ★ Suspension
- ★ Making up missed service hours
- Program operating policies:
 - ★ Timesheets
 - ★ Travel policies
 - ★ Expense reimbursement
 - ★ Benefits
 - ★ Living allowance
 - ★ Staff and member roles
- The objectives of the program and how to collect data for evaluation purposes
- Background information about the community or natural environment

Orientation sessions for your staff, site supervisors, and members should include a discussion on the national scope of AmeriCorps, and explanation of how your local program fits into the AmeriCorps network of national service programs.

AmeriCorps Pledge

During the orientation, at the completion of pre-service training, or at another appropriate point, members should be asked to take the AmeriCorps pledge:

I will get things done for America—to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier.

I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.

Faced with apathy, I will take action.

Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.

Faced with adversity, I will persevere.

I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond.

I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.

Copies of the AmeriCorps pledge, suitable for distributing to members as a certificate, are available at <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/pledge.pdf> or <http://www.americorps.gov/about/pledge/index.asp>.

Member training

Programs are required to provide members with the training, skills, and knowledge they need to perform well in their assigned service project. However, as a whole a program may allocate no more than 20 percent of the aggregate required service hours to education and training. It is an important note that this rule applies to programs as a whole not to individual members.

Examples of training for assigned service activities:

- ★ skills training (such as tutoring, mentoring, giving immunizations, etc.)
- ★ working with volunteers
- ★ cross-cultural sensitivity
- ★ team building

Examples of training to develop members:

- ★ citizenship training
- ★ communication
- ★ accommodation of persons with disabilities
- ★ conflict resolution
- ★ resume writing/life after AmeriCorps
- ★ CPR/first aid

National Service Days

Several times throughout the year, AmeriCorps members are asked to come together for special events related to their service. This will allow them to work with community volunteers, other AmeriCorps members and members of other branches of national service. National service days and other events include:

- ★ Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, (January)
- ★ AmeriCorps Week, (May)
- ★ Global Youth Service Day, (April)
- ★ 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance, (September)

AmeriCorps Member Benefits

http://www.americorps.gov/help/ac_sn_all/2010_Megasearch_Site.html

IV. F. LIVING ALLOWANCES, OTHER IN-SERVICE BENEFITS, AND TAXES

Living Allowance

The National and Community Service Act of 1990, as amended, require an AmeriCorps program to provide its full-time members with a living allowance. Each year the Corporation sets the minimum and maximum amount for member living allowance. It is important to always specify that the living allowance is not a wage just as AmeriCorps members are not employees. In regard to the treatment of the member living allowance as income for purposes of determining eligibility for federal benefits programs, the Corporation will continue to work with other federal agencies, states and local entities so that they treat the living allowance appropriately for determining eligibility for other assistance categories.

Health Care

Health care benefits must be made available to all full-time members and meeting the standards established by the grant provisions for the particular grant year. Health care benefits may be provided to members serving less than full time, but no Corporation funds may be used to support the cost. An exception is made for less than full time members who are performing service on a normal full-time schedule for a period of six weeks or more, these members are eligible for health care benefits and corporation funds may be used. The Corporation will not pay for dependent coverage.

Child Care

Eligible members may receive subsidized child care through First Financial Associates while they are participating in national service. Further information on childcare benefits, eligibility, application documents and FAQ can be found at: <http://www.1stfinancialassociates.com/asnprogram.htm> or by calling (770) 484-9200.

Eligibility requirements for AmeriCorps Child care benefits include;

- ★ Must be an active member serving on a normal full-time schedule for a period of at least six weeks.
- ★ Member must need child care services in order to participate in the AmeriCorps program.
- ★ Member's household income must not exceed the maximum amount under the Child Care & Development Fund (CCDF) Block Grant rules established by the state or territory in which the child care services are provided.
- ★ The member must be a custodial parent or legal guardian of a child under the age of 13.
- ★ The child must be living with the member.
- ★ Once the Member is approved and accepts the AmeriCorps CCBP benefits, the member must not be receiving a child care benefit for the same child from any other source.

Members not eligible for child care benefits

Programs may choose to provide child care benefits to less than full-time members from non-CNCS sources of funds. Less than full-time members may be eligible for child care subsidies available through state-administered child care assistance programs. Various state child care programs are also available to families who are on TANF, "at risk" of going on TANF, or losing TANF due to the AmeriCorps living allowance.

Education Awards

With the passage of the Serve America Act the value of AmeriCorps education awards is tied to the maximum value of the Pell Grant and as such changes on a yearly basis. The value of the education award for a particular grant year can be found in the RFP associated with that year and is based on the below terms on service.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Hours completed</i>
Full-time	at least 1700
Half-time	at least 900
Reduced half-time	at least 675
Quarter time	at least 450
Minimum time	at least 300

Requirements for Earning and Education Award (42 C.F.R. 2526.15)

The eligibility of a member to receive an education award is based upon an end of term evaluation which is to be completed by a direct supervisor of that member. The end of term evaluation will assess three basic points, which should be spelled out in the member contract and assignment description. Has the member:

- ★ Completed the required number of service hours for the term of service;
- ★ Satisfactorily performed on assignments, tasks, or projects; and
- ★ Met any performance criteria as determined by the program and communicated to the member.

The responsibility for determining and certifying members' eligibility for an education award is the programs and as such the program should have contained in their grievance procedures language pertaining to a member who is exited without an education award.

Education Award Usage (42 U.S.C. 12604)

After a member has completed their term of service and the exit has been certified by the program the education award will become available for disbursement through the My AmeriCorps portal. In general AmeriCorps members may use the education award to:

- ★ to repay student loans;
- ★ to pay all or part of the cost of attendance or other educational expenses at an institution of higher education;
- ★ to pay expenses incurred in participating in an approved school-to-work program;
- ★ to pay expenses incurred in enrolling in an educational institution or training establishment that is approved under chapter 36 of title 38, United States Code, or other applicable provisions of law, for offering programs of education, apprenticeship, or on-job training for which educational assistance may be provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and
- ★ to pay interest expenses in accordance with regulations.

Not all schools and loan providers are eligible to receive AmeriCorps Education Award payments, for further description of eligible institutions see 42 U.S.C. 12604 or contact the National Service Trust.

Members can split their awards to pay a combination of any of the above educational expenses. The payment will be made to the school or loan holder designated by the member but not to the AmeriCorps member. Members have seven years from the end of their term of service to use the awards.

Allowable Education Expenses

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/current/education_award.asp

& 42 U.S.C. § 12604(c)

Current educational expenses include:

- The "Cost of Attendance" for a degree- or certificate-granting program of study at a qualified school; and
- Educational expenses for non-degree courses offered by qualified schools, such as continuing education courses.

You can use your education award at Title IV institutions of higher education (including graduate and professional programs), as well as qualified vocational schools. An institution is considered a Title IV school, if it has an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education making its students eligible for at least one of the federally backed forms of financial assistance (such as Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, Stafford Loans, National Direct Loans, and Federal Consolidated Loans).

Your education award can also be used at a program of education approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Beginning with terms of service that started on or after October 1, 2009, you may also use your award to pay expenses incurred in enrolling in an educational institution or training establishment that is approved under the GI Bill.

To make sure the institution you want to attend is qualified, check with the financial aid office of your institution before you make specific plans.

Qualified Loans

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/current/education_award.asp

The national service legislation defines *qualified student loan* as a loan backed by the federal government under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (except PLUS Loans to parents of students), or under Titles VII or VIII of the Public Health Service Act. Additionally AmeriCorps Education Awards may be used to repay a student loan made by a state agency, including state institutions of higher education. AmeriCorps Education Awards may not be used to repay any other type of loan, even if the loan was obtained for educational purposes. You can use your AmeriCorps Education Award to repay defaulted student loans as long as the loans meet the definition of *qualified student loan*.

If you have any questions about whether a loan meets the definition, please contact the National Service Trust at (888) 507-5962.

Interest Payments

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/benefits_ed_award_repayment.asp

Individuals who have successfully completed a term of service in AmeriCorps or Silver Scholars are eligible to have the Trust pay as much as 100% of the interest that accrued on their qualified student loan during their service. The portion that the Trust will pay is determined by the type of service (full or part-time) and the length of service period.

The Trust will not pay interest if the member failed to complete their term of service unless there is a compelling personal circumstance and the member earned a pro-rated award. An interest payment can only be made after you have completed your service and have earned an award.

Interest payments, as well as payments made from your education award account, are considered by the IRS to be taxable income in the year in which a payment is made.

Education Awards and Taxes

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/benefits_ed_award_taxes.asp)

The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, unlike most other forms of scholarships and fellowships, is subject to federal tax in the year the payment is made when and how much of the education award is redeemed may have an impact on the members overall income tax responsibility.

The Trust DOES NOT deduct taxes from education awards or interest payments. If an education award and interest payments total more than \$600.00 in a calendar year, in January of the following year, the Corporation will send a Form 1099 to be used in income tax return preparation. The total sum of interest payments and the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award payments are listed together on the 1099 form.

However, members may be eligible for other tax relief through the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997. For more information check the following resources:

The IRS, <http://www.irs.gov/faqs/content/0,,id=200041,00.html>; phone: (800) 829-1040. Or request IRS Publication 970, Tax Benefits for Higher Education, by calling

(800) TAX-FORM ((800) 829-3676) or by downloading it from the IRS website;

The Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OPE/PPI/HOPE/index.html>.

Forbearance

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/benefits_ed_award_repayment.asp

Individuals who are serving in a term of service in an approved AmeriCorps or Silver Scholar position may be eligible to postpone the repayment of their qualified student loans through an action called loan forbearance. While a loan is in forbearance it continues to accrue interest however, at successful completion of a term of service the National Service Trust will pay all or a portion of the interest accrued on the loan. Requests for forbearance can be made on-line through [My AmeriCorps](#). If there are unforeseen delays with the My AmeriCorps portal members may request to use a paper Forbearance Request Form which is available to you online at http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/tta/forms.asp.

Chapter Four

Member Management

Member Records

For each member entered into an AmeriCorps position there are a number of records that must be retained by the program. In some instances these records may be stored electronically, but as many require signatures a file must be kept for each member. If your program intends to keep any member records in an electronic format the system must meet all requirements of Sections 1703 and 1705 of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act.

For each member records must be kept of: the member's application, documentation of eligibility, contract, time sheets, performance evaluations, entrance and exit forms (Depending on programs internal policies), and documentation of criminal history, FBI, and National Sex Offender Public Registry (NSOPR) checks. All of these items will be discussed further in the remainder of this chapter.

Some required documentation can or should be stored separately from the member file. Common documentation that may be stored separately is documentation of childcare eligibility, tax forms, and criminal history background check results. It is important to note here that *any member medical documentation received by the program should not be stored with the member file*. All medical information should be stored in a separate location locked and only available to those personnel for whom it is necessary.

Supervisors and program directors should conduct periodic reviews of member files to ensure that service hours are being accurately tracked and that member files are current and complete.

Member Eligibility (45 C.F.R. 2522.20)

To be eligible to enroll in AmeriCorps, an individual must:

Be a U.S. citizen or U.S. national or a lawful permanent resident alien of the United States;

Be at least 17 years old (or at least 16 years of age if the member is out of school and a participant in a youth corps or a program for certain disadvantaged individuals);

Allowable documentation for verifying member citizenship and age includes:

Primary documentation of status as U.S. citizen or national.

- A birth certificate showing that the individual was born in one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, or the Northern Mariana Islands
- A U.S. passport
- A report of birth abroad of a U.S. Citizen (FS-240) issued by the State Department
- Certificate of birth—foreign service (U.S. Dept. of State Form FS-545)
- Certification of Report of Birth (U.S. Dept. of State Form DS-1350)

- INS certificate of naturalization (INS form N-550 or N-570); or
- INS certificate of citizenship (INS form N-560 or N-561).
- Primary documentation of status as a lawful permanent resident alien of the U.S.
- The following are acceptable forms of certifying status as a lawful permanent resident alien of the United States.
 - Permanent Resident Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card (INS Form I-551) an unexpired passport indicating that the INS has approved it as temporary evidence of lawful admission for permanent residence; or
 - a departure record (INS Form I-94) indicating that the INS has approved it as temporary evidence of lawful admission for permanent residence.
- Secondary documentation. If primary documentation is not available, the program must obtain written approval from the Corporation that other documentation is sufficient to demonstrate the individual's status as a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or lawful permanent resident alien.
- Please note that individuals who are in the United States under a student, work, or tourist visa are not eligible to become AmeriCorps members. Similarly, individuals who have refugee status but nothing indicating permanent resident alien status are not eligible to become AmeriCorps members.

Received a high school diploma or its equivalent; or

- Not have dropped out of elementary or secondary school to enroll as an AmeriCorps participant and must agree to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent prior to using the education award; or
- Obtain a waiver from the Corporation based on an independent evaluation secured by the program demonstrating that the individual is not capable of obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent; or
- Be enrolled in an institution of higher education on an ability to benefit basis and be considered eligible for funds under section 484 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1091);

For tutoring programs (42 U.S.C 12572)

- The applicant must have obtained a high school diploma
 - Unless the tutoring services are through a structured, school managed cross-grade tutoring program

High School Diploma and Self-Certification

Member files do not need to include a copy of the high school diploma or equivalent, if the completed member enrollment form with a signed self-certification regarding educational level is maintained in the member files.

For members who are school dropouts, programs must provide support services to help them get a high school diploma or equivalent certificate. Members must have their high school diploma or equivalent, or obtain a waiver, to access their education awards. For programs that include the attainment of high school equivalency as a purpose of their program and include GED classes during

the program year the attainment of a high school degree or equivalent may be a requirement of the completion of the member term of service.

Terms of Service

A term of service must be stated in a member contract. There are two definitions which must be followed with regard to the term of service (1) a full time term of service is defined as 1,700 hours of service over a period of not more than one year (2) a part time term of service is defined as 900 hours of service during a period of not more than two years. There are no specific guidelines on the amount of time which a member must be allowed to complete a less than halftime term however regulations do state that a program must “ensure that each member has sufficient opportunity to complete the required number of hours for their education award”. AmeriCorps grant provisions further state that “[in] planning for the member’s term of service, the [sub]grantee must account for holidays and other time off, and must provide each member with sufficient opportunity to make up missed hours.”

An exception to all term of service rules is allowed if a member is serving in an approved national service position directly related to disaster response. In this case the member may extend their term of service for up to 90 days. During this extended service period the program is permitted to continue offering that member with a living allowance and other benefits however, the value of the member’s education award will not change.

Member Start and End dates

Member start and end dates must fall within the start and end dates of the subcontract issued by OCS which will always be a 12 month period. Members, whether receiving a stipend or not, cannot continue to serve beyond the end date of the contract unless some unforeseen and special circumstance arises where the contract must be extended to allow members to complete their service hours. The continuation of a grant beyond the pre-approved end date is referred to as a “no-cost extension” and must be requested from OCS at least 30 days before the end of the contract. No-cost extensions are reserved for situations where a member(s) needs additional time to complete their term of service. Extending a contract will also result in the adjustment of required reporting dates and may create additional reporting requirements for the program.

Number of Education Awards

Under no circumstances will an individual be eligible to receive more than the equivalent of two full time education awards.

Serving Multiple Terms

The Edward M. Kennedy [Serve America Act Final Rule](#) (published August 20, 2010) increased the limit of terms one may serve in AmeriCorps State and National from two to four terms with added limits stating no individual may receive more than the aggregate value of two full-time education awards regardless of the stream of service through which the member earns the award. The following guidance is provided by CNCS:

Although the *amount* of a full-time award may change, the *value* of a fulltime award will always be equal to 1. For example, an individual who completed a part-time position approved in 2009 received an education award of \$2,362.50. The value of this award is the amount received, \$2,362.50, divided by \$4,725, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .5. Another individual completes a parttime position approved in 2010 and receives an education award of \$2,675. The value of this award is the amount received, \$2,675, divided by \$5,350, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .5. Using this calculation, the value of an award received for part-time service will always be equal to .5. If an individual leaves a term of service for compelling personal circumstances and receives a pro-rated award, the value attributed to that award will be based on the amount actually received. For example, an individual was released for compelling personal circumstances from a full-time position approved in 2009 after serving 800 hours, and received a pro-rated award of \$2,223.52. The value of this award is the amount of the award received, \$2,223.52, divided by, \$4,725, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .47. Another individual was released for compelling personal circumstances from a full-time position approved in 2010 after serving 800 hours, and received a pro-rated award of \$2,517.64. The value of this award is the amount of the award received, \$2,517.64, divided by \$5,350, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .47.

For further guidance on this issue contact the grants officer at the Governor’s Office of Community Service

<i>AmeriCorps National Service Network</i>	<i>Maximum Number of Terms within each type of AmeriCorps Program</i>
AmeriCorps*State & National	4
AmeriCorps*NCCC	2
AmeriCorps*VISTA	3

Exhaustion of the number of terms one may serve in AmeriCorps State and National would not necessarily prevent an individual from enrolling in a position in another national service program, such as AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps VISTA, or Silver Scholars.

Team Leaders

The National and Community Service Act, as amended, provides for approved national service positions to include a “position involving service as a crew leader in a youth corps program or a similar position supporting a national service program that receives an approved national service position” 42 U.S.C § 12573(6). This language allows programs, in addition to youth corps, to use AmeriCorps members to provide an additional layer of leadership and support for members under certain conditions.

In general, all prohibited activities listed in Section IV. of the AmeriCorps Provisions apply to Team Leaders just as they do to all AmeriCorps members. Team Leaders are not permitted to act in a staff capacity or supervise members. Team Leaders must not be responsible for program development and coordination; however, they may assist by providing information and resources on best practices or by helping to develop portions of the program such as the training curriculum. Under no

circumstances should an AmeriCorps member serving as a Team Leader be the individual legally responsible for the program or other members.

http://www.ofm.wa.gov/serve/wa/grantees/ac_provisions_june_2011_final.pdf

The Team Leader position description should predominantly include activities that involve them performing direct service or providing support to members engaged in direct service.

Examples of *allowable* Team Leader activities:

- ★ working alongside members performing direct service, to serve as a model and to provide on the spot assistance;
- ★ training members; providing guidance to members; providing support to members, including reflection exercises, conflict resolution, advice for transitioning out of AmeriCorps, etc.;
- ★ leading monthly/weekly meeting of members;
- ★ working with the community to develop partnerships, including community volunteers, that will support the members' projects; and
- ★ communicating with program staff, site supervisors, and other members to ensure the execution of a quality program that is consistent with the AmeriCorps provisions.

While Team Leaders are not to serve as the program's administrative staff, they may be engaged, on a limited basis, in activities that support the administration of the AmeriCorps program. These include:

- ★ raising funds or in-kind contributions in direct support of specific AmeriCorps projects, such as team service projects. See Section IV. of the AmeriCorps Provisions for greater detail regarding members and fundraising; and
- ★ participating in recruitment activities for new members.

Examples of *unallowable* Team Leader activities:

- ★ signing member timesheets;
- ★ accessing another members file;
- ★ managing the program's payroll and budget
- ★ evaluating member performance;
- ★ disciplining AmeriCorps members;
- ★ enrolling/dismissing AmeriCorps members;

Criminal History Check (42 U.S.C. 12645g)

With the passage of the Serve America it is now a requirement that all AmeriCorps members and any program staff funded, either by match or federal funds, through AmeriCorps must submit to the following two requirements:

- 1) a name-based search of the National Sex Offender Public Registry (NSOPR), and
- 2) a search of the State criminal registry or repository in the State in which the program is operating and the State in which the individual was last a permanent resident

The NSOPR is a name based search of registered sexual offenders maintained by the Department of Justice (DOJ). This check is designed recover offender records from all 50 states, oftentimes however a search will result in an error message indicating that some particular state’s records are not available. When this message is received the program MUST demonstrate due diligence to receive results from all 50 states by repeating the check. Failure to document due diligence in attempting to receive NSOPR check results from all 50 states may result in the member being removed from service and all costs associated with that members service will be disallowed. All checks, successful or not, of the NSOPR should be documented

The NSOPR is a name based search of registered sexual offenders maintained by the Department of Justice (DOJ). The check is designed to search the sex offender registries for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and Indian Country. The check must be performed no earlier than the application date and no later than enrollment. If a search results in an error message indicating that some particular state’s records are not available the program MUST demonstrate due diligence to receive results from all 50 states by repeating the check. If a search results in “hits” the program MUST demonstrate that each result was reviewed and that none of the resulting individuals from the search the member. Failure to document due diligence in attempting to receive NSOPR check results from all 50 states or resolve “hits” before enrollment may result in the member being removed from service and all costs associated with that members service will be disallowed. All checks, successful or not, of the NSOPR should be documented.

For individuals serving under an AmeriCorps grant and who will have recurring access to a vulnerable population a third step is added to the requirements:

- 1) an NSOPR check, and
- 2) a state repository check as stated above, and
- 3) an FBI fingerprint check.

There are certain situations under which an organization may consider requesting an Alternative Search Protocol (ASP) that would allow a program do deviate from the Corporations criminal history check procedures. For more information on ASPs review AmeriCorps regulations <http://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2011/07/06/2011-16509/ameriacorps-statenational-senior-companions-foster-grandparents-and-retired-and-senior-volunteer#h-24> and contact the Office of Community Service’s Grants Officer.

Programs should very carefully follow the requirements for National Service Criminal History Checks. Please refer to: http://www.nationalservice.gov/for_organizations/manage/history_checks.asp to ensure that the timing, safeguards, permissions and timing of this law are followed.

Member Supervision

The eGrants System

Most member and program/grant management tasks will be completed through the eGrants portal which also serves as the repository for applications coming through the My AmeriCorps website. Questions regarding eGrants should first be directed to the eGrants helpline and secondarily to OCS. Help Desk Information: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/questions/app/ask> or 1-800-942-2677.

Member Contracts (AmeriCorps Grant Provisions)

The member contract is the document that will explain to a member his or her responsibilities and rights as an AmeriCorps member in a specific program. The minimum required components of a member contract are as follows.

At a minimum the member contract must contain the following:

- ★ Member position description;

Each member must have a position description for their service activities including performance criteria. It is the responsibility of the grantee to ensure that member positions “do not include or put the AmeriCorps member in a situation in which the member is at risk for engaging in any prohibited activity (see 45 CFR § 2520.65).” Resources to aid in creating a member position description can be found at http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/create_a_position_description.php

- ★ Member term of service

Each contract must state the number of hours the member must serve to complete their term of service and the time span over which that member has to complete their service hours.

- ★ The amount of the education award

The amount of the education award the member will receive for successful completion of their service

- ★ Standards of Conduct

Describe how the member is expected to behave under the specific circumstances of their service; this may include dress code and appropriate use of language.

- ★ Prohibited Activities (45C.F.R. 2520)

E.g. including lobbying, political, religious, or advocacy activities

- ★ Drug Free Workplace Act

Programs receiving federal funds must follow the Drug Free Workplace Act and publish a drug- free workplace statement.

- ★ Suspension, Termination and Release for Cause

The guidelines under which an AmeriCorps member’s term of service can be found in 45 C.F.R 2522.230

- ★ Grievance Procedures (45 C.F.R. 2540.230)

Including Grievance procedures in the member contract ensures that the member receives the procedure and signs acknowledging the receipt

- ★ Other requirements by Grantee

Grantees may also include in the contract any additional requirements necessary for the member to complete their term of service tied to the member’s education award. Examples of additional requirements of members may be required attendance of service events or a minimum of volunteers recruited.

Guidelines for Fundraising by Members (45 CFR 2520.44)

In general, AmeriCorps members cannot assist their organizations with major fundraising efforts or in writing grant applications to the Corporation. However, Corporation policy permits some limited activities related to fundraising by AmeriCorps members when such activities support directly the service of your program.

For example, members may:

- ★ Seek donations of books from companies and individuals for a program in which volunteers teach children to read;
- ★ Write a grant proposal to a foundation to secure resources to support the training of volunteers.
- ★ Securing supplies and equipment from the community to enable volunteers to help build houses for low-income individuals
- ★ Securing financial resources from the community to assist in launching or expanding a program that provides social services to the members of the community and is delivered, in whole or in part, through the members of a community-based organization
- ★ Seeking donations from alumni of the program for specific service projects being performed by current members

Members may not:

- ★ Raise funds for living allowances or for an organization's general (as opposed to project) operating expenses or endowment.
- ★ Write a grant application to the Corporation or to any other Federal agency

Member hours spent on fund raising must be tracked on their time logs and may not exceed 10% of his or her originally agreed-upon term of service, as reflected in the member enrollment in the National Service Trust (45 C.F.R. 2520.45).

Evaluating Member Performance (45 CFR 2522.220)

It is a requirement that every AmeriCorps member regardless of slot type and whether they are exited with an award receive an end of term evaluation. Additionally a member serving in a slot of half time or greater must receive a mid-term evaluation. A member evaluation must record at a minimum:

- ★ The number of hours the member has completed and whether this satisfies their term of service.
- ★ Whether the participant has satisfactorily completed assignments, tasks or projects.
- ★ Whether the participant has met other performance criteria which had been clearly communicated both orally and in writing at the beginning of the term of service.

Under AmeriCorps regulations end of term evaluations are the key piece in determining a member's eligibility for additional terms of service. For this reason all members, regardless of the status of their exit, must receive an end of term evaluation. Additionally, members must disclose any previous terms of service when applying for an AmeriCorps slot, so the program can contact the applicants previous host sites requesting information on the applicant's previous evaluations.

Member Safety

Under grant provisions, programs must have appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the safety of members. Members may not participate in projects or undertake service activities that pose a significant safety risk. Programs should establish appropriate policies related to the supervision of members and provide specific training to minimize risks to members.

Voting

Programs should encourage all eligible members to vote and when appropriate allow members time during to vote during service hours.

Release of a Member (45 C.F.R. § 2522.230)

Programs may release members for compelling personal circumstance or for Cause.

Releasing a Member for Compelling Personal Circumstances

This circumstance allows a member to end their term of service early while still receiving a prorated education award. There are two qualifications: (1) the member must have completed at least 15% of their term and (2) they must demonstrate a compelling personal circumstance. It is the duty of the member to demonstrate the compelling personal circumstance and the AmeriCorps program to determine whether or not the member's reason for leaving is legitimately a compelling personal circumstance. For additional guidance on whether a release for compelling personal circumstance is warranted the program should contact the Governor's Office of Community Service.

Compelling personal circumstances are those that are beyond the participant's control, such as, but not limited to:

- ★ A participant's disability or serious illness;
- ★ Disability, serious illness, or death of a participant's family member if this makes completing a term unreasonably difficult or impossible; or
- ★ Conditions attributable to the program or otherwise unforeseeable and beyond the participant's control, such as a natural disaster, a strike, relocation of a spouse, or the nonrenewal or premature closing of a project or program, that make completing a term unreasonably difficult or impossible;

Other circumstances the Corporation, has for public policy reasons, determined as such, including:

- ★ Military service obligations;
- ★ Acceptance by a participant of an opportunity to make the transition from welfare to work; or
- ★ Acceptance of an employment opportunity by a participant serving in a program that includes in its approved objectives the promotion of employment among its participants.

Compelling personal circumstances do not include leaving a program:

- ★ To enroll in school;
- ★ To obtain employment, other than in moving from welfare to work or in leaving a program that includes in its approved objectives the promotion of employment among its participants; or
- ★ Because of dissatisfaction with the program.

As an alternative to releasing a participant, after determining that compelling personal circumstances exist, the program may suspend the participant's term of service for up to two years (or longer if approved by the Corporation based on extenuating circumstances) to allow the participant to complete service with the same or a similar AmeriCorps program at a later time.

It is not necessary for a program to receive or maintain documentation of a compelling personal circumstance (e.g. a doctor's note, etc.) but, it is necessary to document that the member was released for compelling personal circumstance.

Releasing a Member for Cause

Under the National and Community Service Act of 1990 as amended a release for cause encompasses any circumstances other than compelling personal circumstances that warrant an individual's release. These circumstances could include anything from disciplinary removals pursuant to the program's contract with the member, to the member's exit prior to completing service hours.

AmeriCorps programs must release for cause any participant who is convicted of a felony or the sale or distribution of a controlled substance during a term of service. In either of these instances the program must notify the Governor's Office of Community service upon the member's release.

What are the consequences of releasing a member for cause?

- ★ The member will not receive any portion of the education award or any other payment from the National Service Trust, including loan forbearance.
- ★ An individual who is released for cause must disclose this fact in any subsequent applications to participate in an AmeriCorps program. Failure to do so disqualifies the individual for an education award.

Regardless of the situation under which a member is released it is required that they be exited in the eGrants system within 30 days and that, if they are receiving childcare benefits, the provider be notified immediately.

Transferring a Member (AmeriCorps State and National Policy FAQ C. 55)

With restrictions a commission, parent organization, or Corporation Program Officer may grant permission to transfer a member to another AmeriCorps*State or AmeriCorps*National program. As a general rule, members may not transfer across different streams of service (e.g. from AmeriCorps*State or *National to AmeriCorps*VISTA).

Replacing a Member (Slot Refill)

If you have fully enrolled your awarded member slots, you may replace any member who terminates service before completing **30%** of his or her term without receiving a pro-rated education award. A slot that is being re-filled does not necessarily need to be replaced with the same slot type, but the resulting education award from the re-fill must be equivalent to that which was originally awarded. That is, a full time slot may be replaced with a full time slot, two half time slots, or three (3) quarter time slots. While not a necessity programs may contact the Governor's Office of Community Service for assistance in assuring that all slot refill requirements are met. Additionally slots that are re-filled cannot be re-filled a second time.

Exiting a Member

In order to officially end their time in AmeriCorps, whether they have complete their term of service or not, members should either exit themselves through the My AmeriCorps portal or complete and sign the National Service Trust End of Term Form. In the case that a member does not exit themselves and cannot be reached by the program the program should complete a national trust exit form indicating that the member was not available to sign the form and keep this documentation in the member file. The final step of the exit process is for the program to exit the member from eGrants, it is required for this to be completed within 30 days of the member's final hour served.

Site Visits

AmeriCorps programs should expect site visits from the Governor's Office of Community Service staff and possibly CNCS staff on at least an annual basis. All visits will be coordinated with program staff. Site visits allow OCS and/or CNCS staff to learn more about program service activities and community partnerships; and ensure compliance with Corporation federal and state regulations, policies and grant provisions; to monitor the progress of a program toward meeting Performance Measures and to provide technical assistance to improve the quality of the program.

Chapter Five

Fiscal Management

It is expected that organizations operating an AmeriCorps grant have in place the necessary tools to ensure that all federal funds are properly allocated, documented and accounted for. Additionally, programs should adhere to best accounting practices whenever possible given the capacity of their organization. The financial management of a program will be monitored in three ways 1) through monthly periodic expense reports, 2) through quarterly federal financial reports, and 3) through fiscal site visits from OCS staff.

Setting up Financial Systems

The grant award and its provisions contain many of the specific details for the governing and management of the grant. The organization's financial officer and accountant should be familiar with the more detailed financial and management requirements contained in Corporation regulations, the grant provisions and the applicable Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular.

The Basics of a Good Financial Management System

To build a good financial management system, programs must use generally accepted accounting practices with general ledgers and similar books of record, supported by source documentation that establishes a clear audit trail. The financial reports must lead back to the ledgers and source documents clearly.

Individual time distribution records (time sheets) must be kept for all staff charging time to the grant, in whole or in part regardless of their status as exempt or non-exempt, identifying the individual source of funds to which time is being charged. This is especially important for staff who are only partially funded under the grant and whose other duties would be unallowable under AmeriCorps funding, such as lobbying or fundraising activities.

Further, as a best practice, grantees should segregate office financial duties to the extent possible, this could include but is not limited to: having one person sign the checks and another reconcile the bank statement, and ensuring that employees are not allowed to sign their own paychecks. The checklist below will help you organize and fulfill your fiscal duties.

Checklist for Setting up Financial Systems

Set up AmeriCorps Account

The AmeriCorps account must be a separate account in the organization ledger or have a separate account number. All Corporation grant awards must be tracked separately.

eGrants Access

To gain eGrants access an employee must first create an account, this will automatically generate an e-mail for the eGrants administrator within the organization. When the

administrator receives the e-mail they will approve or deny the employees access and assign them an appropriate access level.

Tracking In-Kind Services

The program is responsible for tracking in-kind services from partners and from their own agency. This includes donated items as well as staff time. It is recommended that the program develop an in-kind donation tracking sheet that can be used to document each individual donation that will be counted as match. This document should allow for the donor to estimate the value of the donated good or service as well as a place for listing the actual amount claimed as match.

Tracking In-Kind Match

A system must be developed to track your cash match. Your program is expected to meet your budgeted match. Cash match is held to the same allow-ability and documentation as that of federal funds awarded under the grant.

Disbursement of Stipends

Members must receive their stipends in equal installments over the term of service. The stipend is not dependent on the number of hours served in any service period.

For members completing their hours prior the completion of their term of service, they may be exited with an award, but they can only receive a stipend for the period during which they were serving.

If a member serves no hours during a period they will still receive a living allowance however, it is recommended that if a member goes 30 days without completing any service hours the member be suspended or released.

OMB Circulars

The OMB circulars cited in your grant address many of the details and specifics governing the management of a federal grant including allowable expenses. It is important to note that the OMB circulars do not alone cover all allowable grant expenses. For example volunteer time generated by an organization may be counted as match under some federal grants, but follows stricter guidelines under AmeriCorps regulation. If you have any questions, contact the financial officer assigned to your grant.

Common Problems

If your organization does not comply with the grant provisions and OMB requirements, costs that have been charged to the grant can be questioned or disallowed. If a program's financial management system is seriously inadequate, the granting agency or the Corporation can stop making reimbursement payments, suspend funds, terminate the grant, recover funds, or take other legal steps.

Some of the most common problems are:

- ★ inadequate accounting practices;
- ★ poor internal controls;
- ★ inadequate documentation and record-keeping;

- ★ inaccurate financial status reports; and
- ★ undocumented matching contributions, particularly in-kind.

Allowable Costs

In general, a cost is allowable if it meets the following criteria:

- ★ It is reasonable and necessary for the performance of the grant award.
- ★ It conforms to the limitations and exclusions in the award as to types or amounts of cost items.
- ★ It is consistent with the policies and procedures of the grantee organization.
- ★ It is documented adequately.

Taxes

Most programs are required to pay FICA. Under federal law, the FICA payment rate is 15.3 percent of the living allowance. Half (7.65 percent) is paid by the program and half is deducted from the member's living allowance. FICA payments cover Social Security and Medicare benefits.

Withholding Income Taxes

Under federal tax laws, ordinary income tax rules apply to member benefits. A living allowance is taxable as "compensation for services" and generally is subject to federal withholding. Room and board also may count as income subject to withholding, even though the members do not receive cash. Low-income members may be able to claim an exemption from withholding if (1) they had no tax liability in the previous year, and (2) they expect to have no tax liability in the current year. State income tax withholding laws also apply.

Like all personal income taxes, taxes on the living allowance are the responsibility of the individual member. Members must complete a W-4 form at the start of the term of service. At the end of the tax year, programs must provide members with a W-2 form.

Match Requirements

Cost Matching Requirements for AmeriCorps Programs

You are responsible for meeting the matching amounts in your negotiated grant award and budget. This amount based on your proposal may exceed the minimum match required.

Valid documentation of match includes:

- ★ Donations, letters/statements of costs that show the type of donation, value and frequency;
- ★ Time and effort forms or others that show contribution of time to program by staff;
- ★ In kind receipt/voucher forms;

Acceptable Sources of In-Kind Contributions – Examples:

- ★ Professional Services
- ★ Meetings held in donated space
- ★ Public service announcements
- ★ Recognition events

As a general rule it is not allowable to use federal funds as match for an AmeriCorps grant. The exception to this rule is if, “independent authority for a grantee to use other federal funds in connection with a national service program” is documented other sources of federal funds may be used as match. If your program wishes to seek independent authority work with your grants officer to determine proper documentation.

Fundraising Rules for Program Staff

Under OMB circulars you cannot charge to your grant the costs of “organized fundraising” or expenses incurred “solely to raise capital or obtain contributions” (however it is allowable to apply an appropriate amount of indirect funds to these activities).

In general, AmeriCorps members cannot assist their organizations with major fundraising efforts. However, Corporation policy permits some limited activities related to fundraising by AmeriCorps members to the extent that such activities:

- ★ provide immediate and direct support to a specific and direct service activity;
- ★ fall within the program’s approved direct service objectives;
- ★ are not the primary activity of the program; and
- ★ do not involve more than 10% of any individual members time.

Following are some examples of what you can do with federal grant funds.

Program staff may:

- ★ Develop and print materials such as brochures and annual reports to be used for outreach to the general public, which includes potential board members, funders, and community partners.
- ★ Contact individuals and organizations that are potential partners who may assist your program in delivering services.
- ★ Ask your board of directors and other volunteers to raise funds on their own time.
- ★ Pay for a program evaluation to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of your program.
- ★ Solicit community involvement with or in-kind support for your program—e.g., seek volunteers to help with a project and donations of building supplies for a construction project.
- ★ Coordinate community involvement in a day of service, serve-a-thon, and other direct service activities that may have a fundraising element.
- ★ Include members of the public (including funders and other community partners) on your general mailing list for newsletters or brochures and other general interest publications. (Publications paid for from AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, should not contain solicitations of donations).
- ★ Include in your general-purpose newsletter a “wish list” of needed in-kind items.
- ★ Invite members of the public, including funders, to make a site visit to your program.
- ★ Ask for advice from individuals with expertise who may be business or foundation staff regarding matters such as program development, training, and evaluation.

- ★ Invite members of the public, including funders and other community partners, to attend graduation ceremonies and other special events.
- ★ Ask a local business to sponsor a recognition event for members or volunteers.

Program staff may not:

- ★ Use AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, to develop promotional materials solely targeted at prospective funders.
- ★ Use AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, to engage in a direct mail campaign to raise funds.
- ★ Use AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, to conduct capital campaigns or endowment drives.
- ★ Hire a development consultant and charge fees to your AmeriCorps grant.
- ★ Charge time spent by staff on fundraising to sources of AmeriCorps or other federal grant funds.

Grant Modifications

Changes in the Grant Not Involving the Budget

Examples of program changes that require prior written approval of OCS and/or CNCS:

- ★ changes in the scope or goals of the program;
- ★ changes in the start and end dates of a grant;
- ★ decisions to sub-grant or sub-contract out AmeriCorps activities not previously approved;

Changes in the Grant Involving the Budget

Examples of program changes that require prior written approval of OCS and/or CNCS:

- ★ Purchases of equipment over \$5,000 unless specified in the grant award budget.
- ★ Transferring funds from one budget category to another.
- ★ Moving budget from Member Support costs to Program Operating costs.

Changes to the grant budget should be requested through the budget modification form found in the reporting workbook supplied to the program.

Retention of Grant Records *45 CFR § 2541.420*

In general, you must keep all records for a period of three years or more from the date of submission of the appropriate final financial status report for the period. If an audit is started prior to the expiration of the three-year period, the records must be retained until the audit findings involving the records have been resolved and final action taken.

Audit Requirements

Recipients of federal grant awards who spend \$500,000 or more in total federal awards are required to have audits performed in accordance with OMB Circular A-133. OMB Circular A-133 can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/circulars/a133/a133.pdf>

The Role of the Office of the Inspector General

The Corporation's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is an independent and objective office established to help improve the Corporation's programs and operations (including AmeriCorps). The OIG has the responsibility of keeping the Corporation's Chief Executive Officer and the Congress informed about problems and deficiencies relating to the Corporation's programs and operations. The OIG carries out this role by conducting and supervising audits and investigations that promote economy and efficiency, and prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse, in the Corporation programs and operations. The OIG is authorized by statute to have full access to all records, reports, and other available material in conducting its work. The OIG also coordinates the Corporation's relationships on matters of fraud, waste and mismanagement with other organizations, including federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

When to contact the Office of the Inspector General

Programs should promptly contact the Office of the Inspector General whenever someone in the organization discovers information indicating there may have been waste, fraud, or abuse, or any violation of criminal law at your program or program site. The OIG accepts confidential referrals of information.

Written notifications should be submitted to:

Office of Inspector General
Department of Health & Human Services
ATTN: HOTLINE
PO Box 23489
Washington, DC 20026

The OIG can also be reached by calling 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477).

Closeout Process

Grant Close-out as outlined in the AmeriCorps Provisions. It is important that all of the activity of the grant has concluded and all members have completed their service. Close-out forms can be found at http://serve.mt.gov/?page_id=3040 under the Grant Closeout heading. All close-out documents are due to OCS 45 days following the end of the grant period by 5:00 pm MST.

Financial Reporting

A Federal Financial Report (FFR) must be submitted to the Commission each quarter by the 20th day of the month following the reporting period. If the due date falls on a weekend or holiday the report will be due on the next business day. FFR reporting forms are included in the monthly reporting workbook sent to programs monthly. Additionally, on a semi-annual basis programs will be required to report any other sources of federal funds being used as match on the AmeriCorps grant.

On a monthly basis a Periodic Expense Report (PER) is due as well as a Request for Reimbursement (RFR). These reports provide OCS updates on program spending for desktop monitoring and serve as

the request for CNCS funds. Both of these reports are due on the final day of the month following the reporting period. These reports will be e-mailed to the program on a monthly basis

Chapter Six

Training and Technical Assistance

The Montana Commission on Community Service is committed to providing quality assistance to AmeriCorps programs in the state. In addition to coordinating training events, the Commission acts as a referral for programs to: 1) locate local, regional, and national training opportunities for both staff and members, 2) partner with other programs in the state to create a collaborative environment where best practices are shared and, 3) provide assistance through scholarships for program staff to attend training events identified as pertinent to their development as an AmeriCorps subgrantee.

Needs Assessment

The Commission is strongly invested in working with programs to provide training and technical assistance to strengthen individual programs and succeed as national service grant recipients. The Commission currently utilizes several strategies to continuously assess the training and technical assistance needs of AmeriCorps programs, the result of which is a dynamic, multifaceted approach that works with programs both collaboratively and individually to address the identified needs.

Training Evaluation

All training and technical assistance activities conducted through the Commission will be evaluated by participants. Information received through the evaluation form is compiled and used when planning future training activities.

Annual Training Calendar for AmeriCorps Programs

An annual training calendar will be provided to programs and will consist of the following activities:

Program Directors' Training

Quarterly training events and or calls will be held on various topics based on the needs assessment of the programs. The program directors' training brings all national service staff together for professional development and networking.

ServeMontana Symposium

A conference/event designed on sustainable volunteerism. This event brings all of Montana's volunteer entities together and provides a forum to discuss sustainability as well as promote civic engagement.

Montana Nonprofit Association

The Montana Commission sponsors one person from each AmeriCorps State program to attend the annual conference.

The National Resource Center

The National Service Resource Center is one of the AmeriCorps National Training and Technical Assistance providers funded by the Corporation for National Service. The National Service Resource Center (NSRC) is operated by ETR Associates (Education, Training and Research), a national nonprofit health education agency. NSRC serves as a central point for sharing information about effective training and technical assistance (T/TA) resources and other materials relevant to AmeriCorps programs. The Resource Center is your one-stop shop for online tools and training resources to strengthen your volunteer or service program. Sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service and administered by ETR Associates, The Resource Center is the central point for:

- Sharing training and technical assistance information among the Corporation's three main programs—Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America
- Sharing information with potential grantees to help them apply for Corporation resources
- Providing technical assistance to any organization using volunteers to strengthen local communities

The Resource Center contains online training tools, event calendars, effective practices, as well as a catalogue of printed publications and videos available on loan. The Resource Center's content is generated by a network of more than 20 training and technical assistance providers funded by the Corporation to serve the needs of volunteer and service programs. In addition, the Resource Center serves as a learning exchange where individual programs can share their innovations and effective practices with others. <http://nationalserviceresources.org/>

Project STAR

Corporation for National and Community Service grantees are invited to contact Project STAR to learn how to more effectively measure program performance and plan evaluations. Do you need help understanding the Corporation's performance measurement and evaluation requirements? Do you want to learn more about performance measurement terms, logic models, indicators, data collection instruments, reporting methods and the elements of an evaluation plan? Visit Project STAR to find the answers. <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/star/star>

Chapter Seven

Additional Resources

Useful Online Resources

Recruitment

http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/members/index.asp

AmeriCorps Gear and Signage

<http://www.nationalservicegear.org/>

AmeriCorps Provisions and Regulations

http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp

AmeriCorps Legislation http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp

AmeriCorps Alumni

www.americorpsalums.org

Education Award Information

http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/alumni/education_award.asp

Resource center for information

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org>

Sample Forms

Sample forms can be found on the National Service Resource Center website through the following link:

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/samples-from-the-field>

or through a general search of the resource center

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/>

When to Contact OCS

Situation	Contact requirement	Point of contact
Appeal – funding decisions	Required	Executive Director
Budget transfer	Pre-approval required	Financial Manager
Changes in key grant staff	Required	Grants Manager
Changes to program scope	Pre-approval required	Grants Manager
Contract amendment	Required	Financial Manager
eGrant problem – application submission	Required - documentation	Grants Manager & eGrants Helpline
eGrants problems – general	Contact eGrants first	eGrants Helpline
Entering partnerships not included in original subgrant	Required	Grants Manager
Equipment purchase – unbudgeted	Required	Financial Manager
Grant closeout	Required	Financial Manager
Grant extension request	Required - 30 days in advance	Grants Manager
Grant funds will be unused	If grant funds will potentially be left unspent contact OCS ASAP	Financial Manager
Grievance filing (host site/staff)	Recommended	Grants Manager
Grievance filing (member)	Required	Grants Manager
Late reporting – progress report	Required - extension request	Grants Manager
Late reporting –PER, RFR, FFR	Required - extension request	Financial Manager
Major audit findings	Required	Financial Manager
Member slots left unfiled	Optional	Grants Manager
Member suspension	Required	Grants Manager
Member transfer – in	Optional	Grants Manager
Member transfer – out	Required - need approval	Grants Manager
Member serious injury or death	Required	Grants Manager
National Service Day - event	Required	Communications Manager
Pre award grant spending	Required - need approval	Financial Manager
Press/media events	Recommended	Communications Manager
Press release/News coverage	Recommended	Communications Manager
Reasonable accommodation	Optional	Grants Manager
Member release– compelling personal circumstance	Optional	Grants Manager
Member release – for cause	Required - if involving a felony or is drug related	Grants Manager
Member replacement	Required - need approval	Grants Manager
Reporting/submission deadlines	Consult website first	Serve.mt.gov
Service events	Recommended	Communications Manager
Slot conversion	Required - need approval	Grants Manager
Slots left unfilled	Contact OCS ASAP	Grants Manager