

**I. 10 am Chair Morgan Turnbough Welcomes and Opens Meeting**

a. Roll Call, Nick Bennett

- i. Commissioners Present: Morgan Turnbough\*, Rob Lawler, Autumn Bahr, Dylan Davids\*, Dawn English, Clifford Kipp, Jim Larson, Pete Pace, Thomas Risberg\*, Jacob Strissel, Jim Swan
- ii. GOCS Staff Present: Director Sarah Sadowski; Keena Irby, Fiscal Officer; Kristina Jordan, Program Officer; Anastasia Matheison, Program Specialist; Nick Bennett, Administrative Specialist.
- iii. Guests: Cindy Erickson, Angela Carter, Big Sky Senior Services: Lisa Lamere, AmeriCorps Seniors; Samara Lynde, Margaret Mason, RSVP; Angela Nelmark, RMDC; Josh Vanek, Lizzy Daly, Daniele Vickers, Dan Corradini, Montana Campus Network for Civic Engagement (MCNCE); Jono McKinney, Wendy Wigert, MCC; Bryan Wilson, BSWC; Duane Schlaback, Olivia Klein, FWP; Amanda Coyle, AgCorps; Angela Davis, Montana State University, Office of Rural Health; Carly Collins, Billings Metro VISTA Project (BMVP), Jonah Casale, BMVP VISTA member; Stephen Ravas, Emily Flannagan, AC OIG. Melissa Mohler\*, AmeriCorps, Tatianna Floyd\*, AmeriCorps.
- iv. Excused Absences: Commissioners Becky Nelson, Vicki Turner, Zach Hawkins, Donnie Wetzel Jr.

\* *Indicates on Zoom*

b. Opening Activity, Commissioner Kipp- When did service start for you?

c. Group Picture, Nick Bennett

d. Approval of December 11, 2025, Minutes- Chair Turnbough called for a motion to approve the minutes as presented. The motion made by Commissioner Strissel, seconded by Commissioner Lawler. Minutes were approved by acclamation.

e. Commissioner Reports & Updates: please share recent volunteer engagements

- i. Commissioner English began: She spoke of the recent MLK Read for Peace event where they had a variety of volunteers engaging with up to 700 students.
- ii. Commissioner Lawler: reported on a service trip where he drove a group of students to Idaho Falls for a retreat.
- iii. Commissioner Kipp: update on the Last Best Alumni council, new members to the team. They have a variety of Alumni events planned for the year, and forthcoming updates on their newsletter and socials media accounts.

**II. 10:25am Regional Office Update, Dylan Davids, Senior Portfolio Manager, Mountain Region**

**A. Report from ASC Leadership Meeting:**

- i. Agency leadership expressed appreciation for engagement at the February ASC Leadership Meeting. Acting Director Arminda Pappas previewed upcoming “renovations” (policy changes for the next program year), which were later shared with the ASN community via email.
- ii. Questions remain; formal guidance and materials are forthcoming. The agency plans to host office hours. These changes aim to improve efficiency and ease award management.
- iii. Formula: Guidance is anticipated soon. The agency is aware of appropriations directing formula awards by April 1 and expects to provide updates shortly.
- iv. AmeriCorps Week: Theme is *AmeriCorps in Action: Americans Serving America*.
- v. Notice of Funding Opportunities: Largely unchanged from February, with a new requirement of a minimum of 20 members for new and re-compete competitive applicants (not applicable to Native Nations or formula). Pre-award costs are approved up to one month prior to program start. Updates to selection

criteria (Community, Logic Model, Notice Priority, Member Supervision). Disclosures: awards may be reduced or terminated if not aligned with agency priorities.

vi. AmeriCorps Seniors – RSVP (New & Recompets): Opportunity to expand programs; applicants working with older adults encouraged. Applications due 3/26. Technical assistance offered 2/19–3/19. FY2026 priorities include supporting older adults/caregivers, workforce re-entry, strong families, fraud prevention, homelessness reduction, and behavioral health.

vii. VISTA: Summer Associates returning; select sponsors invited to apply. Opportunities will appear in the portal this spring. FY26 Concept Paper cycle is open through 3/26, details available online.

viii. Questions: Commissioner Swann asked about data on tribal funding applications. Davids referenced a prior Rocky Boy award, noted ongoing discussions on tribal participation, and will follow up with additional information.

### **III. 10:40am AmeriCorps Office of the Inspector General, Stephen Ravas**

i. Introduction & OIG Priorities: Ravas introduced himself and outlined his goals to strengthen relationships between OIG and AmeriCorps, improve audit and investigation quality, and increase stakeholder outreach. He noted a gap in communication with grantees and described efforts to address this by visiting state commissions, explaining OIG’s role, and supporting stronger internal controls.

ii. OIG Role & Approach: Ravas emphasized that OIG shares AmeriCorps’ mission and aims to improve program effectiveness and outcomes. He highlighted collaboration, transparency, and awareness as key priorities. OIG advisories are intended to support, not intimidate, grantees. He encouraged commissioners to follow OIG updates and review case summaries for guidance on procedures and best practices.

iii. Discussion: Internal Controls & Fraud Prevention: In response to Director Sadowski, Ravas advised that organizations of all sizes face risks and stressed the importance of communication, collaboration, and strong internal controls. He noted that fraud is common but preventable through proper procedures and early intervention.

Commissioner Bahr asked about internal controls training. OIG staff Emily Flanagan indicated they are developing resources and suggested potential use of “drills” to prevent fraud. Ravas added that fraud often extends beyond AmeriCorps funding and emphasized understanding organizational vulnerabilities. He will follow up with additional training recommendations.

iv. Training & Audit vs. Investigation: Director Sadowski highlighted existing training efforts, including webinars, fraud prevention practices, and OIG resources. She noted Montana’s goal to set a national standard.

In response to a question on audits vs. investigations, Ravas explained: Audits are compliance-focused, proactive reviews intended to identify issues early and support course correction. Investigations are reactive, initiated by complaints, and assess potential violations, including possible referral to the Department of Justice.

-Chair Turnbough thanked Revas.

### **IV. 10:55am Director’s Update, Director Sadowski**

A. Staffing, Leadership Convening, AmeriCorps Engagement Opportunities – August, FFY2026 federal budget, Memorial, Commissioner terms.

i. Staffing & Leadership Updates: Director Sadowski introduced Nick Bennett and noted the departure of Elaine Dahl, recognizing her contributions to monitoring and risk assessment. She reported ongoing HR activity and upcoming staffing updates.

ii. ASC Convening & AmeriCorps Updates: Director Sadowski discussed the ASC convening, emphasizing the diversity of state commissions and the importance of state-led approaches and

partnerships. She shared updates from meetings with agency leadership in Washington, D.C., noting a current focus on systemic “renovations.” She stressed the importance of staying informed and sharing updates with grantees, along with continued attention to compliance and an upcoming service plan update.

iii. AmeriCorps Week & Engagement Opportunities: Director Sadowski recognized AmeriCorps Week and Governor Greg Gianforte’s proclamation. She highlighted the ServeMontana Symposium, featuring speakers including Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras and Mayor Emily Dean. She encouraged commissioners and staff to engage with members and attendees.

iv. Federal Budget & Commissioner Terms: Director Sadowski reported that the FFY2026 federal budget has passed and expressed optimism regarding commissioner reinstatements. She requested recommendations for potential replacements and noted that the FY2027 budget process is beginning. Commissioners were asked to confirm their intent to renew; all present indicated interest in continuing.

v. Threshold of Life Memorial: Director Sadowski shared updates on the Threshold of Life Memorial, including formation of a GOCS-led workgroup and an upcoming April ceremony. She highlighted Montana’s ~80% donor registration rate and discussed outreach efforts, including the Gift of Life license plate program. She noted that kidneys are the highest-demand organ and encouraged support for the memorial, while acknowledging the loss reflected in increased donor numbers.

vi. Questions: No questions were raised.

## **V. 11:10am Governor’s Office of Community Service Updates**

A. AmeriCorps, Kristina Jordan, Program Officer

i. Grants update – competitive & formula

1. Competitive:

- FY26 applications will be submitted to AmeriCorps later this month, as the Notice of Funding Opportunity was received in January.

- Funding decisions anticipated in June, subject to change. Competitive funding decisions have potential to impact Formula fund availability.

- Currently operating FY25 programs: Justice for Montanans is halfway through program year, Big Sky Watershed Corps started in January.

2. Formula:

- Received FY26 guidance from AmeriCorps on 3/10 which keeps the cost per MSY of \$25,199. Montana’s allocation is \$931,497. GOCS will start strategizing regarding potential funding impacts.

- Process starting now, Letters of Intent due 3/19.

ii. Anticipating Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and & Community Health Corps Montana (CHCM) continuation applications, AgCorps recompile application, and possibly a new program from Montana Campus Network for Civic Engagement (MCNCE). Montana State Library planning will not apply for program funding this year.

iii. Applications due 4/23, Grant review workgroup meeting set for 5/19. Goal to approve funding recommendations at regularly scheduled June meeting of the Commission.

- Currently operating FY25 programs: FWP, AgCorps, and CHCM started in January. CHCM had to adjust to January start due to last year’s terminations, goal to have September start this year.

- MCNCE and State Library planning are halfway through the planning process.

3. National Service Training

i. AmeriCorps-specific training hosted annually by America’s Service Commissions. All Montana AmeriCorps State programs are required to send one program and one fiscal staff to this training, either in-person or virtually.

ii. This year’s in-person training will be in Dallas, TX, April 14-16th. The virtual option is scheduled for April 29–30. GOCS and staff from all subrecipients will attend either in-person or virtually.

B. Financial Status Report, Keena Irby, Fiscal Officer

i. GOCS is on track to fully spend down Commission Support funds

ii. 22TAD Commission Investment is fully spent and starting to spend 25TAD

- iii. GOCS is understaffed and may request another no-cost extension to 25TAD
  - iv. AmeriCorps plans to release guidance for Fiscal Year 2027 CSG & CIF mid-March, with applications due mid-April and awards expected by June 1, 2026
  - v. ESA is overspent, due to DLI reversing GOCS ability to use General Fund that was appropriated during legislation
  - vi. We requested an increase to ESA, which includes 1.5 FTE, that DLI overlooked during legislation
  - vii. EPP has begun for 2029
  - viii. GOCS has received \$62,500 from Reach Higher for Youth Serve Montana Scholarships and will receive \$3,000 from Montana's Credit Unions for ServeMontana Awards.
  - ix. Questions: Commissioner Swan: Why are there strikethroughs on the fiscal report? Keena Irby: this is to show the general fund dollar amount that has been taken from us.
- C. ServeMontana, Anastasia Matheison, Program Specialist
- i. Youth Serve Montana Scholarships: awarding 90 this year at \$1,500 per student.
  - ii. ServeMontana Award update & Ceremony June 12: 28 nominations, 20 complete applications
  - iii. Gift of Life Ceremony, April 24: She encourages all to attend the event.
  - v. Questions: Commissioner Lawler asks what the starting time is for the Serve Awards? 10:30? Donate Life events are going on from 8-2. Serve Awards 9:30-3. Commissioner Kipp asks about meeting scholarship recipients. Anastasia Matheison mentions that we will keep people updated if someone is needed to present awarded scholarships.

#### **VI. 1125a New Business, Chair Turnbough**

- i. ServeMontana Awards workgroup confirmation: Chair Turnbough asks for list of workgroup participants: Anastasia Matheison notes that commissioners Kipp, Larson, and Lawler volunteered to review applicants. All three declare that they are still willing. Anastasia sets the review date for April 8th at noon. Chair Turnbough offers to be a backup for this.
- ii. Grant Review workgroup formation: Request for 3-4 Commissioners to volunteer as grant reviewers for the spring Formula FY26 competition.
- iii. Timeline: Applications due 4/23; materials sent to reviewers in the week of 4/27; Reviewer orientation via Zoom the week of 5/4; Grant Review full day in Helena on 5/19; Commission meeting to vote on recommendation 6/11. Chair Turnbough called for volunteers, Commissioner Turner volunteered ahead of time. Commissioners Bahr and Strissel volunteered during the meeting.

#### **VII. 1140a Public Comment**

- i. Josh Vanek of MCNCE discusses the Montana Student Volunteer Awards. He describes the awards and asks commissioners to attend on April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 3pm.
- ii. Lizzy Daly of MCNCE discusses the start of their process and communications with partners. She mentions their goal of improving student civil services and health (?).
- iii. Jono McKinney of MCC thanks everyone. He reflects on last year as difficult and that he is grateful for MCC retaining grants. He recognizes that despite the turmoil, service was strong and meaningful. Morale was high and members were thankful for being able to serve, despite the challenges. He notes that the presence of AmeriCorps members in rural areas has increased and been a positive experience. MCC was selected for a project of the year award. He further describes MCC work. He mentions Senator Daines' "America the Beautiful" bill that authorizes 2 billion \$ a year for outdoor recreation and states that he is optimistic about the future.
- iv. Director Sadowski acknowledges the MT Student Volunteer awards. She recognizes AmeriCorps Seniors in front of the commission and applauds their numbers and hard work. She thanks Chair Turnbough.
- v. Chair Turnbough adjourns the meeting.

**VIII. 1145a Adjourn; Lunch provided as part of the ServeMontana Symposium**

Next regularly scheduled Commission meeting on Thursday, June 11, 2026

Stay overnight and attend the ServeMontana Awards Ceremony June 12, 2026