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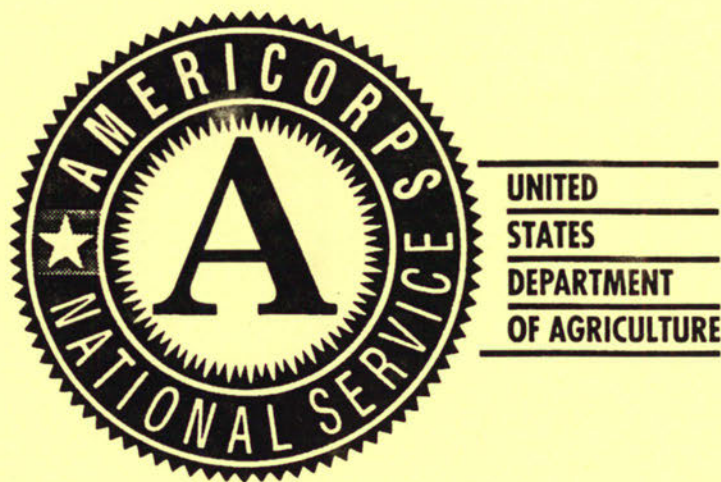
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AMERICORPS

OPERATIONS MANUAL



JUNE 1995

Acknowledgment Page

AmeriCorps Team USDA would like to acknowledge and to thank those people who provided assistance in developing this manual during the past year. Assistance was provided by many different sources throughout the Department of Agriculture. A note of thanks must be extended to the people in personnel and finance who helped to develop and design the needed procedures for this program to go forward. Our sincere appreciation goes to Ron DeMunbrun, USDA Office of National Service, for his untiring efforts to find those elusive answers. Also, a very special thanks must go to the USDA Operations Manual Team, consisting of Dave White, Bill Snyder, Dee DiFiore of NRCS and Don Hanson of the Forest Service. It was through their determination and dedication that this manual was developed and completed.



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Chapter One

Program Overview

Purpose

The purpose of the AmeriCorps Program is to "get things done" using the concept of national service as the vehicle. It offers opportunities to all Americans to serve their country and earn education awards in return. It is a grassroots effort to solve the problems facing communities across the Nation. The AmeriCorps Program is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

AmeriCorps Ethic

The AmeriCorps Ethic is:

- **getting things done.** Our primary goal is to improve communities by meeting their education, public safety, human, and environmental needs.
- **strengthening communities.** AmeriCorps brings together individuals from different backgrounds and institutions, with different missions and cultures, in the common effort to improve our communities.
- **encouraging responsibility.** AmeriCorps encourages members to explore and exercise their responsibilities toward their communities, themselves, and their families during their service experience and throughout their lives.
- **expanding opportunity.** AmeriCorps Members receive awards to further their education or pay back their student loans, as well as invaluable service experience, specialized training, and life skills.



Program Identity

AmeriCorps has a dual identity. As a community-based program, AmeriCorps meets local needs using local strategies. As a national program, AmeriCorps has national visibility and results.

Benefits of Community Identity

- Strengthen communities
- Resolve problems within the community

Benefits of National Identity

- Increased visibility. The CNCS will do a public relations campaign at the start of the AmeriCorps project year, including extensive media outreach; television, radio, and print public service announcements; and the participation of Administration officials and celebrities in a number of local events. This campaign will continue throughout the year, incorporating a one-half hour documentary on national service and additional activities to lend visibility.
- Enhanced Member experience. The feeling of being a part of a team begins at the program level; it is magnified by being part of a larger force. Membership in AmeriCorps provides context to the service experience.
- Sustainable funding. By showing Congress that AmeriCorps is cost-effective, programs have the opportunity to enjoy a long-term base of funding that is relatively flexible.
- Access to new ideas and program resources.



AmeriCorps Logo

An AmeriCorps/USDA logo is available on camera-ready slicks.

Logo may be added to:

- uniforms,
- stationery items,
- signs identifying the AmeriCorps program,
- recruitment brochures,
- member curriculum and orientation materials,
- banners for AmeriCorps events,
- press releases for AmeriCorps events, and
- publications created by AmeriCorps Members.

Members may also use the logo on business cards, although Federal funds may not be used to print such cards.

Other uses must be approved by the CNCS. Logo may not be used, without written permission, on the following:

- materials that will be sold,
- clothing intended to be worn primarily by individuals who are not members or alumni/ae,
- 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 materials.



Signs

The Corporation will provide AmeriCorps signs to USDA. Whenever possible, please use the signs to designate AmeriCorps project sites as this will let communities know when Members are working in their local area.

USDA will also provide sites with permanent metal signs to be posted at physical worksites so that our AmeriCorps Members and staff can take lasting credit for the work they performed throughout America--just as alumni of the original CCC can now view plaques at the sites they constructed throughout the country. The signs should be posted at sites where members have performed service: building, repairing and/or renovating physical sites -- such as homes trailheads, timber bridges, kiosks, soup kitchens, community gardens, public parks, environmental education centers, campgrounds, etc.

Standard Paragraph

Include the following two paragraphs in all promotional materials for USDA AmeriCorps programs:

AmeriCorps is President Clinton's national service program, passed with bipartisan support from Congress, that engages 20,000 Americans of diverse backgrounds in performing service that meets critical community needs in return for an educational award, which may be used to pay for college, job training, or graduate school, or to pay back student loans. The majority of AmeriCorps Members are working in partnerships with states, local governments, and non-profit organizations.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is running three types of AmeriCorps teams in 38 states, composed of approximately 1,200 members: an Anti-Hunger Team, a Public Lands and Environment Team, and a Rural Development Team. Many of the AmeriCorps projects are sponsored by community-based organizations and all projects designed to get things done, while boosting community, opportunity, and responsibility.



AmeriCorps/USDA Mission Statement

The mission of the USDA AmeriCorps program is to engage a diverse group of Americans in working partnerships with communities to provide real and measurable service to meet environmental and human needs, while earning education benefits and building an ethic of service, responsibility, and citizenship.

AmeriCorps/USDA Vision Statement

The vision of the AmeriCorps/USDA program is to have created a model Federal national service program that has, at the end of the first five years of operation:

- improved the quality of life significantly in communities across the country,
- developed a clear national identity respected for its focus on successful results,
- accomplished a measurable series of concrete goals in meeting environmental and human needs, and
- created new ways to reinvent government to make it more accountable and responsive to the citizens who fund it.

The vision is to institutionalize an innovative, respected, and sustainable program within the Department and implement a long-term plan for expansion and replication that eventually makes quality service opportunities available to all Americans.



UNITED
STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Program Benefits

The AmeriCorps Program is designed as a holistic program, in that everyone involved with the program will benefit. Its goal is to "get things done." It is a program for all Americans and provides a strategy for solving the most critical problems facing the nation today.

Those involved in the program benefit in the following ways:

- Communities gain the opportunity to resolve problems within the community.
- Sponsors gain the opportunity to accomplish tasks which would not otherwise be accomplished. Provides a new strategy to "get things done."
- Members gain "real-life" experience, a broad array of training, the opportunity to serve their community and their country, and an educational award.

In the course of solving community problems, the program will strengthen communities and members. It will build an ethic of national service and encourage people to invest in their community.



The Philosophy of AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps is based on a key principle of American society that is as old as the republic itself: the idea that, not only does the democracy have the duty to protect and nourish the well-being of its citizens, but that citizens have an equal duty to protect and nourish the well-being of the democracy.

Thomas Jefferson put it this way:

"A debt of service is due from every man to his country proportioned to the bounties which nature and fortune measured to him."

This spirit of mutual civic obligation distinguished the United States from all other nations of the world. Eventually expanding these rights and obligations to all Americans, the United States earned its status as the leader of the Free World. Unfortunately, many Americans now believe the country has drifted from these roots of shared community.

AmeriCorps rebuilds this sense of community that made America great. By bringing together Americans of all races, classes, genders, religions, and physical abilities to work side-by-side, AmeriCorps will strengthen the cords that bind us together as a people. The "sweat equity" created by AmeriCorps can play an important role in healing the nation's wounds and bridging our divisions. AmeriCorps will fundamentally change the country because it creates a new civic compact in which any citizen can be tied to the nation by the simple virtue of making a difference in the lives of others.



AmeriCorps promotes personal responsibility. AmeriCorps gives all Americans a new way of giving something back to the country. It reminds us that, along with rights we enjoy as citizens, we all have certain obligations to protecting those rights and aiding our own communities. Furthermore, AmeriCorps gives young people a tangible way to take charge of their own lives.

AmeriCorps expands educational and economic opportunity. Members in the program will receive a living stipend and will also receive an educational award worth \$4,725 for each year of service successfully performed. AmeriCorps is one of the major Administration initiatives aimed at making post-secondary education once again affordable for most Americans.

AmeriCorps unites the interests of the middle class and the poor. There is NO economic needs test to participate in this program--the only requirement to participate is a desire to serve the country. This program will greatly boost students from the previously forgotten middle class, who now are told their families "make too much money" to qualify for existing Federal aid programs. Yet the program will also help poor families for whom current aid programs are insufficient.

How AmeriCorps Works

Most AmeriCorps projects will begin in the fall, placing 20,000 members in projects throughout the country. While the 20,000 number may seem modest, it is larger than the highest-ever yearly number of people in the Peace Corps. It is anticipated that the number of members will grow yearly.

While USDA manages the largest single Federal agency component of AmeriCorps, Federal agencies in general run only a small portion of AmeriCorps, comprising only about one-eighth of the overall program. Most AmeriCorps projects are funded and overseen by state commissions appointed by each state's governor. Other AmeriCorps projects are funded and managed by national non-profit organizations.

Service will be focused on meeting unmet human, environmental, public safety, and educational needs. The slogan of CNCS is "Getting Things Done" and AmeriCorps will continually focus on accomplishing useful and measurable work of high quality. AmeriCorps is not a jobs program, it is a service program.

Individuals may apply for the program either through CNCS or through the individual projects at each location. Both CNCS and USDA will have their own toll-free 800 lines for recruitment.

AmeriCorps will recruit a socio-economically diverse group of Americans. AmeriCorps will bring together Americans of all races, classes, genders, and physical abilities. Members must be age 17 or older, but there is no upper age limit for participation; while we expect that some senior citizens and middle age citizens will participate in the program, it is likely that most members will be 18-26. Members can be high school graduates, vocational school students, college students, college graduates, or professional school graduates. Members can also be high school dropouts if they agree to work towards their GED while in the program.

Members will earn a living allowance and will earn an educational benefit in exchange for a year of service successfully performed. The allowance is provided because members still have to pay for food, transportation, and housing for the year in which they provide full-time service. The educational benefit can be used to pay for college, graduate school, or vocational school in advance, or to repay qualified student loans. It can also be used to pay for job training apprenticeship programs approved by the Department of Labor or Education.



USDA AmeriCorps Program

USDA will run three AmeriCorps teams:

- Public Lands and Environment Team
- Rural Development Team
- Anti-Hunger Team

Both the Anti-Hunger Team and the Public Lands and Environment Team will share the same corps-type model of service, engaging a mix of people to perform service in work crews--usually ten members each--at pilot locations. The work crews may include:

- people who may or may not have completed high school,
- college students, and
- college graduates.

In the Rural Development Team, members will engage in both rural economic planning and rural environment projects, but the program design is very different than the other two USDA programs. The team will establish regional locations of at least five professional and paraprofessional members who assist rural communities in identifying needs and resources necessary for economic, human, and environmental well-being. The members would have highly varied education and training and would be matched up with communities or regions having unmet needs that can be filled by someone with that specific background.

Cluster Requirement: All groups of five are required to meet at least once a month. In order to accommodate this requirement, all members in a cluster must work on a daily basis in duty stations within a fifty mile radius or 100 mile drive -- whichever is shorter.

Chapter Two

Legal Authorities and Restrictions

Legislative Authorities

The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, which was signed into law by President Clinton on September 12, 1993 and became Public Law 103-82, provides legislative authority for the AmeriCorps National Service Program.

This law authorizes Federal Departments to apply for and receive financial assistance to implement national service programs. If a Department receives any funds via this law (as USDA does), the full authority contained in PL 103-82 is conveyed to that Department. Thus, the program and the Members in the USDA program are governed by rules and regulations of AmeriCorps.

Kenneth E. Cohen, USDA Assistant General Counsel for Research and Operations, wrote the following in a memo of March 11, 1994 regarding authorities conveyed to USDA through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS):

"USDA may receive assistance from the Corporation (CNCS) (sec 121(b)(1), 107 Stat. 788). The Act confers upon USDA the authority, if it receives assistance under section 121, to conduct national service programs or to enter into contracts or cooperative agreements. While USDA is not fettered in the type of entity that may receive assistance from USDA, existing national service programs should under section 121(b)(4) be considered. Receiving assistance under section 121 confers considerable authority on USDA under the Act that we would not otherwise enjoy generally. No minimum amount of assistance from the Corporation is required to trigger section 121."



Federal Register (Rules and Regulations)

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) published Final rule of 45 CFR Parts 2510, 2513, et al. on March 23, 1994 in the Federal Register.

The portion of this instrument which is applicable to agreements with Federal agencies for the provision of AmeriCorps program assistance is Part 2523--Agreements with Other Federal Agencies for the Provision of AmeriCorps Program Assistance, beginning on page 13804, and also Parts 2521 and 2522.

A reference copy of this instrument is found at Appendix A.

Grant Provisions

The CNCS has published an instrument called "AmeriCorps USA--Direct Grant Provisions."

This is a valuable and comprehensive documentation of AmeriCorps program policy and guidelines which should be studied at every AmeriCorps level of responsibility.

A reference copy of this instrument is found at Appendix B.

Delegation of Authority

If the CNCS approves and provides any funds for a project, the authority conveyed by PL 103-82 is delegated to the sponsoring organization.

Third Party--Subgrantee

If an AmeriCorps grantee (USDA) enters into a third party arrangement, the authority conveyed by PL 103-82 is delegated to the subgrantee. Third party agreements should be accomplished by Cooperative Agreements.

Support Services

Activities that do not provide a direct benefit to the community, such as clerical work or research, may be performed if they are in support of a direct service. However, such activities may not be the primary activity of a national service program.

Under no circumstances should an individual AmeriCorps Member spend the bulk of the service year providing administrative or clerical support for other AmeriCorps Members; members may not serve as "administrative coordinators" for projects.



Non-Duplication and Non-Displacement.

AmeriCorps Members may not duplicate work already performed by government agencies nor may they displace existing employees. Section 2540.100 of the regulations of the CNCS (in the Appendix) specify these prohibitions. Please read this section carefully.

AmeriCorps Members may not be used to perform service or duties performed by employees who have left the agency for any reason whatsoever, including downsizing, and may not even be used to perform duties when an employee is on leave, a position is left vacant, or is filled by a specific seasonal employee. This also includes positions vacant due to employees who have taken a buyout. Project sponsors should consult with local unions prior to placing AmeriCorps members to ensure there are no conflicts.

AmeriCorps Members "may not be used to duplicate an activity that is already available in the locality in the program." In other words, if an office is already performing a certain function, AmeriCorps members cannot spend the majority of their time performing more of that function. Thus, AmeriCorps Members may not spend most of their year simply relieving a backlog of normal USDA work. On the other hand, the service performed in each USDA AmeriCorps project must carry out both the general mission of the Department and the specific mission of the USDA agency funding that project. Consequently, our projects face a paradox: they must be similar to USDA work, but not identical to routine USDA work.

The best way to deal with this paradox is to ensure that all our AmeriCorps Members are engaged in creative new projects which our Department would not normally be able to support, but nevertheless directly meets critical community needs.



Member Lobbying

AmeriCorps Members are free to contact Members of Congress and other elected officials to express their support of --or opposition to -- AmeriCorps. The contact must be undertaken at his/her own initiative as a concerned private citizen and on his/her own time (not at the request of the AmeriCorps program or during AmeriCorps service hours). The AmeriCorps Member should be clear that s/he is speaking as a private citizen, but may reference the fact s/he is part of AmeriCorps.

Moreover --- as long as members are not specifically "lobbying" by asking others to specifically support or oppose AmeriCorps --- Members should feel free to explain the AmeriCorps philosophy and the details of their own projects to anyone-- including the media, elected officials, family members, project sponsors, friends, and community residents.



Member and Staff Fundraising

In general, neither members nor staff should spend significant amounts of their time raising funds.

AmeriCorps Members cannot spend the bulk of their year raising funds for their projects, although a minimal part of their service activities may include writing grant proposals to obtain funds for local community development projects. Members should also be briefed on ethics guidelines followed by USDA employees and should not attempt to solicit funds from any "prohibited sources", i.e. entities which are in any way regulated by USDA or may be benefited or harmed by any USDA activities.

USDA staff should also be careful not to solicit funds or any in-kind contributions of tools, equipment, office space, etc., from any "prohibited sources". Any contributions or loan of tools etc. must conform to the provisions of the Agriculture Property Management Regulation, Amendment H-4, Subpart 104-43.80, 12/19/86 and 7 CFR 0.735-12. Employees should err on the side of caution and consult with their agency ethics officials before taking any action to solicit contributions or in-kind donations. Neither AmeriCorps nor USDA can afford even the appearance of conflict of interest, even if an action was taken to advance a generally lofty goal such as obtaining equipment or supplies for a member. In addition, all USDA employees should be aware that Federal law generally restricts significant fundraising activities performed by Federal employees.

The best way to raise funds is for partner organizations to play that role on their own with little or no coordination with AmeriCorps Members or staff. RC&D Councils, Conservation Districts, non-profit organizations, the National Forest Foundation, Friends of the National Arboretum, etc. can all independently raise and accept money and in-kind donations for our projects.



Prohibited Activities

Prohibited activities may not be performed by members in the course of their duties, at the request of program staff, or in a manner that would associate the activities with the national service program or the Corporation. These activities include:

1. any effort to influence legislation,
2. organizing protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes,
3. assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing,
4. impairing existing contracts for activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office,
5. engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious education 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,
6. 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 restriction contained in part 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, and
 - e. an organization engaged in the religious activities described above, unless Corporation assistance is not used to support those religious activities, and
7. Serving for the majority of the year in activities:
 - a. providing office support for other members,
 - b. engaging in public affairs or media outreach activities,
 - c. fundraising,
 - d. Performing routine office work.



Restrictions on Economic Planning Work

Given that many USDA Rural Development Team Members are working on projects to promote economic development, these members must be especially careful not to violate the prohibition on service providing a "Direct benefit to a business organized for profit." Members who interact with for-profit entities should ensure that their work follows the following four principles:

- 1) The service must be focused on providing a general benefit to surrounding community, not a direct benefit to an individual business.
- 2) Any benefit to an individual for-profit entity must be "incidental" and minimal compared to the direct benefit provided to the community.
- 3) All services provided by AmeriCorps Members must be advertised publicly through the media and other information sources and must be made available equally and impartially to all parties in that area.
- 4) Under no conditions should a member work full-time on a project that would benefit solely one for-profit entity.



Chapter Three

Project Design and Development

General

The first step to creating an AmeriCorps proposal lies in project design and development. Once this is done, a formal application can be submitted through USDA to the Corporation.

The AmeriCorps Program is designed to start at the local level, have a direct benefit on the community it serves, and focus on "unmet human, environmental, educational, or public safety needs." The program's goal is to "get things done" and offers communities a new strategy for solving old problems.

In order to capitalize on the opportunities presented by this program, strong community projects must be designed and fully developed. Partnerships need to be formed and broad-based community involvement has to be built.

The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 authorizes Federal agencies to enter into cooperative agreements with youth service corps to carry out national service projects. Consideration should be given to utilizing existing youth corps resources when developing a project proposal.



Identify Needs

During project design and development, agency representatives interested in AmeriCorps may assist communities in identifying their needs. Forming strong partnerships with local organizations, private landowners, farmers, and non-profit groups are key to identifying local needs.

This locally-based approach is designed to insure that all those involved are stakeholders and bring resources to the project. Resources can be cash, in-kind services, or any assets that contribute to the project. Everyone has something to offer.

After extensive communication with area businesses, organizations, and residents, various strategies should be developed to successfully meet area goals. These strategies should be carefully reviewed, discussed, and analyzed and should lead to long-term, sustainable solutions to community problems.

Based on goals, needs, and strategies, project(s) should now be developed.



Residential/Non-residential Projects

Public Lands and Environment Corps:

Both residential and non-residential projects will be in operation. Members in non-residential projects live at home and commute daily to their duty station. Residential projects provide lodging, meals, and other support services for members. The pay of members in residential projects will have "commissary" deductions for the food and lodging which is provided. However, a waiver is required from the CNCS for this deduction. Project managers who have a need for this deduction, should make a request in writing to Agency National Headquarters who in turn will forward the request to the Department.

Rural Development Corps:

All Rural Development Team Members will be located in and around communities with which they will be working. Each member will have a duty station, but will not necessarily report there each day. Rural Development Team Members often work independently, interacting directly with representatives from the communities they serve.

The smallest acceptable team size in an area is five. These five members must meet at least once a month. In order to accommodate this requirement, all members in a cluster must work on a daily basis in duty stations within a fifty mile radius or 100 mile drive -- whichever is shorter.

Project Design and Development

A few of the factors to be considered in project design and development are:

- potential partners,
- availability of funds,
- contributions available from the community, and.
- the scope of the project.

Projects should be well defined and include a mission statement, goals, and objectives. These items help to clarify projects and highlight intended accomplishments.

When writing up the project, a few specific factors to be considered are:

- benefit-cost ratio,
- comparison of alternatives,
- consideration of available agency and community resources,
- potential sponsors, and
- objectives and scope of work for the project(s).

It is during this stage that the AmeriCorps program should be considered. Careful consideration should be given as to how this program can help you reach project goals. The resources available through AmeriCorps must be evaluated as to whether or not this program is the best strategy to use to accomplish project goals. It will not be the best strategy for all projects but for many it offers tremendous resources.

Chapter Four

Cooperative Agreements

The Act

This chapter describes the activities and instruments used to flow down authorities and funds from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, Public Law 103-82 (the Act) through agency implementation. The Act provides for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to issue contracts or cooperative agreements to Federal agencies to carry out national service projects. The CNCS uses a competitive process to determine who will receive Corporation funding. There are separate competitions for Federal agencies, States, and non-Federal organizations.

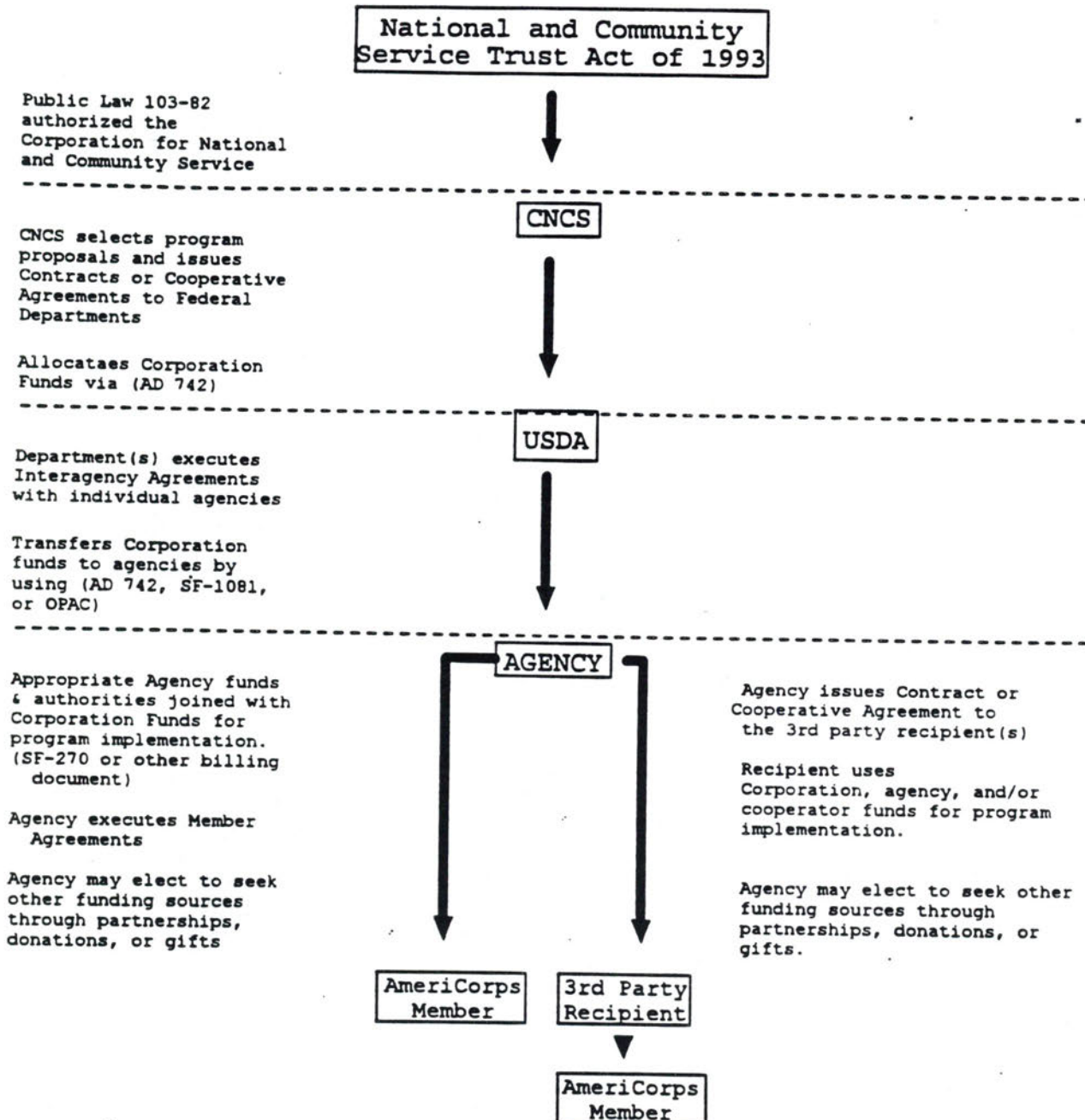
All of the Federal agency applications (sometimes referred to as proposals) are consolidated by each Department and forwarded to CNCS. Federal agency applications must provide complete details regarding their proposed projects, including all project activities, locations, contractors and/or recipients (also referred to as third parties or grantees), and budget breakdowns. If program management activities, competition for those contractors or recipients should have taken place prior to submission of the applications to the Department.

CNCS evaluates the applications against their national service program evaluation criteria, negotiating if necessary, and selects the highest rated Departmental applications for award. Contracts and agreements are then awarded that flow-down from the CNCS to the Departments to the Federal agencies, and in some instances on to contractors or recipients. This process is shown in the flow-chart on the following page and explained in detail throughout the chapter.



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Flow of Contracts or Agreements





Corporation for National and Community Service

Once Departmental applications are selected, CNCS will issue a Corporate contract or Cooperative Agreement (CA) to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Corporate contract or CA will consist of three pieces: an award letter including CNCS requirements, CNCS grant provisions for Federal agencies, and the application submitted by the department. These instruments validate CNCS approval of the projects identified in the USDA application and obligate Corporation funding to be made available to USDA. Since the USDA will not be performing on-the-ground operation of the national service programs, the CNCS funding now contained in a USDA account must be transferred to the respective agencies charged with operating the programs. This is accomplished by the issuance of interagency agreements (IA's) from the USDA to participating agencies.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

In order to effect the transfer of funds from the USDA to the agencies, IA's must be issued. These instruments are bilaterally signed and may be written in a narrative format solely or an AD-672, Reimbursement or Advance of Funds Agreement. Either format should include a detailed explanation of the project, the USDA application approved by CNCS, any other conditions imposed by the USDA or agency. The agency fiscal personnel bill the USDA for the approved funding as shown in the IA, using an AD-1081 or AD-742. This billing effects the transfer of funds into an agency account. It is significant to note that any program performance to be paid using CNCS funds should not begin until the date the last signature is obtained on the interagency agreement and transfer of funding is made.



AGENCIES

The USDA consolidated application to the CNCS will include agency applications (proposals) providing for the AmeriCorps program management and projects to be accomplished with either (1) agency personnel alone or (2) both agency personnel and contractors and/or recipients (also referred to as third party recipients).

AGENCY PERSONNEL

If the USDA application to CNCS proposed all of the AmeriCorps program management and projects to be accomplished using agency personnel alone, there may be no other (sub) contracts or (sub) cooperative agreements needed.

THIRD PARTY INVOLVEMENT

If the USDA application to CNCS proposed the involvement of contractors or third parties (also referred as recipients or grantees) in AmeriCorps program management activities, agencies will need to issue contracts or CA's to the third parties as described below.

1. **AGENCY CONTRACTS.** Under the AmeriCorps Program, agencies, through their respective departments, may receive a Corporate contract issued by CNCS. For agencies that wish to contract their program to a third party, they will need to solicit and award contracts. These contract packages should cite the Corporate contract number and include any pertinent CNCS or USDA requirements. Negotiated contracts normally require a competitive process which takes approximately 120 days for solicitation and award. The (sub) contracts will consist of an award letter with appropriate references to the Corporate contract and other CNCS, USDA, and agency specific requirements, a Standard Form (SF) 33 Or 26, Sections B through J, and incorporation of the contractors technical and cost proposal.

2. **AGENCY COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.** Under the AmeriCorps Program, agencies through their respective departments will receive a Corporate CA issued by CNCS. In order for the agencies to have third parties participate in agency AmeriCorps program management activities, agencies will need to solicit and award (sub) cooperative agreements, effectively making the organizations (sub) recipients. It should be noted that the title "sub-cooperative agreement" will probably not be on the document. At the CNCS or USDA level, it will probably be referred to in discussions as a (sub)cooperative agreement. At the agency level, it may be referred to simply as a cooperative agreement. However, the (sub) cooperative agreement package should cite the Corporate cooperative number and include any pertinent CNCS, USDA, or agency specific requirements.

7 CFR 3015.158 requires competition for cooperative agreements if the estimated value exceeds \$75,000. However, if agencies wish to transfer management of their AmeriCorps activities to other recipients (also referred to as third parties or recipients) after Fiscal Year 1995, the USDA requires agencies to obtain recipient participation competitively, selecting the organizations proposing the best technical approach and highest contributions. This can be a good mechanism to increase the amount of non-Federal contributions to the program and alleviate the need for excessive Federal personnel in the effort. In most instances, the time frames for solicitation and award are much quicker than for contracts. Refer to Appendix C for a sample Forest Service financial assistance announcement for use in the competitive process.

The CNCS requires that Federal agency applications provide complete details regarding their proposed projects, including all project activities, locations, contractors and/or recipients (also referred to as third parties or recipients), and budget breakdowns. In order to accommodate this requirement, recipient competition and selections must be completed prior to submission of the agency application to the USDA. The competitive process will need to get under way early each Fiscal Year (FY), such as competition sought in November of FY 95 for projects proposed in FY 96. The solicitation notice should clearly identify that the award of CA's is contingent upon approval and receipt of CNCS funds and subject to the availability of agency funds made available from Congress. This makes it clear to competing organizations that the agency selection is tentative and contingent upon approval by the USDA and CNCS. If competitors are notified of their tentative selection as potential awardees, the letter should be worded carefully. It should clearly state that the selection is tentative and that no performance should start until the agency has executed a CA. Once tentative selections have been made and any areas in question are negotiated to the parties mutual satisfaction, the application can be included in support of the agency application to the USDA for approval and submission to the CNCS.

Once the CNCS has issued a CA to the USDA/agency, agency CA's may be issued to the selected recipients. Agency CA's consist of an award letter, the third party application (which should include an SF 424, an SF 424A, a complete cost break-down which explains and supports the figures shown in the SF 424A, a narrative statement of the project explaining the third parties technical approach for accomplishing and operating the program, and required assurances and certifications (such as Anti-lobbying, Drug-Free Workplace, etc.)). The award letter should include reference to the Corporate CA and the Office of Management and Budget Circular requirements as implemented by the USDA, agency specific requirements (such as types and frequency of reports, advance vs reimbursable funding and frequency of billing allowed, program income, equipment requirements, etc.), appropriation or management codes needed by the recipient for billing purposes, etc. Agency grant officers can provide detailed information and guidance on agency processes for competition and award of the agency CA's.



3. **PERFORMANCE.** The award of an agency contract or CA validates agency approval of the project performance and obligates the agency funding (either received from the CNCS through the USDA IA or from agency appropriations) to be made available for contractors or third parties to take over management of agency AmeriCorps program activities. After receipt of the award document, contractor or third party personnel may bill the agency, requesting either advance or reimbursable payments depending on what type of funding was approved, up to the maximum amount as shown in the award document. Contractors may use their own billing format. Recipients use an SF 270. These billings effect payment and the transfer of funds from agency accounts to contractor or third party accounts. Normally billings are allowed to occur on a monthly or quarterly basis. It is significant to note that any program performance by contractors or recipients to be paid using agency or CNCS funds should not begin until the date the contract or CA is signed.

Agency personnel and contractors or recipients may anticipate or have negotiated and planned for further transactions which contribute to or support the contracts or CA's. This may lead to the processing and award of other agreements or the acceptance of gifts or donations, as discussed below.

OTHER AGREEMENTS OR DONATIONS

The USDA's consolidated application to the CNCS may include agency applications (proposals) providing for the AmeriCorps program management and projects to be accomplished with either (1) agency personnel alone or (2) both agency personnel and contractors and/or third parties. If agencies proposed to use both agency personnel and third parties, both parties are providing a contribution to the total value of the project. Agency funding is clearly considered an agency contribution to the project. When applicable directly to the agency, IA's with other Federal agencies, agreements separate and apart from an agency CA (such as challenge cost-share or collection agreements), noncash contributions, or cash contributions, the acceptance of donations, or in-kind contributions are also legitimate to include as part of the agency contribution to the project. When applicable directly to a (sub) recipient, donations, noncash contributions, and in-kind contributions may be included as part of their contribution to a CA.



Other agreements or donations made directly to agencies or third parties must always be separated and accounted for respectively; at no time can the agreements be viewed as being intermixed. This is required so that each party's matching contributions are legal, clear, and verifiable upon audit.

Each agency under the USDA has their own enabling statutes which may or may not allow for the award of agreements, acceptance of donations, or use of agency funds for AmeriCorps activities. For example, the USDA Forest Service has statutory authority to enter into challenge cost-share, participating, collection agreements, and several others. However, for the purposes of AmeriCorps activities, the USDA Forest Service may only use cooperative agreements and accept gifts or contributions, as appropriate. When other agreements or donations are to be included as part of an agencies' contribution, the proper instruments must be awarded in accord with agency procedures prior to any performance being started or funds being spent. Close attention should be given to ensure the activities defined under agency statutes and appropriations received by Congress are appropriate for use in AmeriCorps activities. Agency contracting or grant officers can provide detailed information and guidance on agency specific processes for entering into other agreements or accepting gifts donations.

Funding Requirements

If an organization receives a grant from USDA to support the AmeriCorps Members and if the organization actually payrolls the AmeriCorps Members, than that organization is required to provide a match for 15% of the Member's living allowance with non-Federal funds. If however, the sponsoring organization receives only the time of the Members and not significant funds from USDA, and if USDA is actually payrolling the Member, then the organization has no matching requirement.



Chapter Five

Process for Grant Application

The Process

The National Corporation establishes the criteria and content requirements for AmeriCorps applications.

The following information is based on the 1994 process and provides insight into what kinds of information the corporation seeks. Because the format is subject to revision --- and because each USDA agency has a different internal project application and selection process --- USDA employees who plan to develop an AmeriCorps project should first check with their National Headquarters.



Corporation Funding

Each year Congress may allocate funds for the Corporation. These funds will then be given out on a competitive basis. Entities may apply for these funds through the following channels:

1. **State Competition** - the Act directs States to establish State Commissions (Appendix D). Non-profit organizations and State agencies may submit applications to their State Commission. The State Commissions will then select projects for submission to the Corporation. This is a competitive process within the State and then at the national level.
2. **Direct Competition** - national non-profit organizations may submit applications for assistance directly to the National Corporation.
3. **Federal Competition** - Federal agencies may compete for funds. Applications may be submitted only from the Cabinet level. Within USDA, the Office of National Service coordinates agency applications.
4. **Special Set-Asides** - one percent of funds allocated for assistance is set-aside for applications from Indian Tribes. One percent is also to be set-aside for applications from certain territories and possessions.

Note: Rules for non-profit organizations applying for funds vary from those for Federal agencies. Non-profit groups should check with either their State Commissions or the National Corporation. Entities may only apply through one source for a project.



Grant Application Submission

Field personnel who wish to participate in the AmeriCorps Program should follow their chain of authority with the goal of submitting their project to their agency Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Local non-profit organizations who wish to participate in the AmeriCorps Program as partners with Federal agencies should join at the local level to develop projects.

When to Submit Grant Applications

The National Corporation establishes the deadline for submission of applications. Agency field offices will be notified of the deadline when the Corporation establishes it. However, applications can be submitted early to agency headquarters to allow for reviews and changes to improve and strengthen projects.

Number of Requests

There is no limit to the number of project proposals that may be submitted for consideration. The number of proposals approved is dependent upon funds available, and we will not be able to approve all proposals. Proposals must compete in some manner for whatever funds are available. Therefore, it is important that any proposal submitted is well developed, in the correct format, and meets all criteria. Due to the time and energy needed to develop a competitive proposal, it may be best to focus on only one or two project proposals. If someone has several projects they want to propose, consideration might be given to whether the projects are similar enough to be rolled into one umbrella proposal.



Types of Program Assistance

Program assistance falls into two categories: planning or operational.

- **Planning grants** - proposals for planning a national service program may be submitted. If the community has a project they would like to implement but have not completed the planning process, a request for a planning grant may be submitted. Planning grants are for a period of six months to one year only and are not renewable.
- **Operational grants** - operational proposals are for those projects that have completed the planning stage and are ready to begin implementation. Operational grants can include a planning period of not more than six months to complete the final stages of program development before implementation. These grants are renewable. Renewal funding is subject to periodic assessment of program quality, successful performance against stated objectives, and availability of funds.

The Corporation may award operating grants for the purpose of replicating successful program models at other sites. A replicable program model must:

- have a track record of success,
- have identifiable core elements that account for its effectiveness,
- have local support,
- be adaptable to local circumstances, and
- not duplicate a program already in the geographic area.



Type of Projects

Any type of project may be submitted as long as it:

- falls within the agency statutory authority,
- meets priorities established by the agency, USDA, or the National Corporation, and
- meets all project criteria.

Project Criteria

Projects will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Criteria	% of rating
Quality (70%)	
Impact	40%
Program Infrastructure & Capacity	30%
Sustainability	15%
Innovation and Replicability	15%

The following information explains and breakdowns this criteria.



QUALITY (70%)

Impact (40%)

- **Direct and Demonstrable Benefit** - any proposal submitted for approval as an AmeriCorps Program shall provide a direct and demonstrable benefit that is valued by the community. Service activities must result in a specific identifiable service or improvement that otherwise would not be provided with existing funds or volunteers, and that does not duplicate the routine functions of workers or displace paid employees.
- **Strengthening Communities** - programs must strengthen communities, bringing together both institutions and individuals to cooperate in creating lasting and constructive change.
- **Partnerships** - programs must perform projects that are designed, implemented, and evaluated with extensive and broad-based local input, including consultation with representatives from the community served, members (or potential members) in the program, community-based agencies with a demonstrated record of experience in providing services, foundations, businesses, and local labor organizations representing employees of service sponsors if these entities exist in the area to be served.

Partnerships will assist in strengthening communities by offering programs the opportunity to collaborate with various sectors of the community that can provide technical expertise in substantive areas.

- **Diversity** - programs can build strong communities by involving diverse members and staff in activities that encourage mutual understanding and cooperation. Programs must seek actively to include members and staff from the communities in which projects are conducted, as well as individuals of different races and ethnicity's, education levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, both men and women, and individuals with disabilities.
- **Member Development** - the program must be able to instill the ethic and skills needed for productive and active citizenship by engaging members in worthwhile service, education, and leadership development activities; provide members with the training, skills, and knowledge necessary to perform the tasks required in their respective projects, and if appropriate, specific training in a particular field; assist members to earn the equivalent of a high school diploma, if necessary; and provide support to members in their transition to other educational career opportunities.



Quality is also indicated by the extent to which

- the program will provide productive and meaningful education experiences that incorporate service-learning methods;
- the program will meet community needs and involve individuals from diverse backgrounds (including economically disadvantaged youth) who will serve together to solve community problems;
- the principal leaders of the program will be well qualified for their responsibilities;
- the program has sound plans and processes for training, technical assistance, supervision, quality control, evaluation, administration, and other key activities; and
- the program will advance knowledge about how to do effective and innovative community service.

Quality (70%)

Program Infrastructure and Capacity (30%)

The Program's infrastructure and capacity will be evaluated as evidenced by:

- a clear mission statement, objectives, and indicators of success;
- a staff with a strong track record in operating programs similar to that being proposed;
- the organization's past achievements;
- its ability to provide appropriate staff and member orientation, training, and supervision; and
- a plan for continually improving the program based on self-assessment and monitoring of community and member self-satisfaction with work performed.

Sustainability (15%)

The Corporation will measure sustainability by the program's ability to:

- be cost-effective in achieving the identified objectives;
- exceed the match requirements with non-Federal funds or for Federal agencies to provide a substantial match to Corporation funds;
- obtain additional funding sources to sustain the program beyond the period of Corporation support; and
- provide evidence of an existing relationship between the organization(s) and community.

Sustainability is also indicated by the extent to which:

- the program will foster collaborative efforts among local educational agencies, local government agencies, community based agencies, business, and State agencies;
- the program will enjoy strong, broad-based community support; and
- there is evidence that financial resources will be available to continue the program after the expiration of the grant.

Innovation and Replicability (15%)

The Corporation will measure innovation by the program's ability to develop creative or distinctive approaches to meeting program objectives. Replicability will be evaluated on the program elements that are adaptable to other programs, locations, or approaches to service such as a rural community, small city, or part of a larger city.

Priority Proposals

The Corporation also gives priority to proposals that:

- involve members in the design and operation of the program;
- reflect the greatest need for assistance, such as programs targeting low-income areas;
- develop civic responsibility and leadership skills and qualities in members;
- demonstrate the ability to achieve the goals of this part on the basis of the proposal's quality, innovation, replicability, and sustainability; or
- address any other priority established by the Corporation for a particular period.



Application Format

Each new proposal must submit the following information on a disk and in hard copy:

1. Title Page -

- a) Title of Project
- b) Name of Organization
- c) Team Type (PL&E or RDT or Combined)
- d) State of duty station of AmeriCorps Members
- e) County of duty station of AmeriCorps Members
- f) Names of counties served by Members (up to 15 counties)
- g) Congressional District of duty station of Members
- h) Name of site supervisor (at local or county level)
- i) Address, phone number, and fax number of site supervisor
- j) Name of State Project Director
- k) Address, phone number & fax number of State Project Director
- l) Number of Members in Environmental Teams
- m) Number of Members in Rural Development Teams

2. Summary Page - a one page overview containing the following components:

- a) Specific needs to be met
- b) Site design
- c) Number of participants
- d) Description of administering organization
- e) Identification of primary partners

3. Mission and objectives

- a) What is your mission?
- b) What are your annual objectives? (list at least three)

4. **Narrative** (not to exceed 7 pages) In approximately seven pages organized and labeled in the stipulated categories, provide the following information with as much specificity as possible.

(a) **Needs to be met** and appropriateness for national service. Identify the nature of the specific need(s) to be met by the proposed national service program, including how and why these needs are appropriately or uniquely addressed by a national service program. Give a detailed description of the environmental problems to be solved. How do these needs relate to the national priorities? If they do not relate to the national priority areas, please explain why they were selected. Explain the direct benefit of the project to the community. You must be able to demonstrate a direct, quantifiable, measurable benefit to the community. If you cannot measure the benefit, you may need to rethink your project.

Process. What was the process by which the needs were identified? Who was involved identifying the needs and to what extent were residents, of the community in which the service will be provided, involved in any needs assessment activities. Explain in detail the role of each partner in assessment and start-up phase and how each partner will participate during the year.

(b) **Design.** Describe the concept and design for the program, including the nature of specific service activities to be performed by participants and how these activities address the identified needs and meet the program objectives. Describe how the project will be evaluated and monitored during the year. Explain how your success will be measured at the end of the year.



Concept. What is the basic concept for the design of the program? How will the program be structured? Where will it be located? Describe any institutional or programmatic collaborations or partnerships that will be involved in operating the program, including the extent to which the program builds on existing service programs.

Service Activities. What activities will participants engage in, and how will these projects or activities result in direct and demonstrable service that addresses the identified needs. Describe a typical week in the life of program participants, giving concrete examples of the types of activities or duties participants will perform.

Relation to Need. How do the service activities respond to the identified needs?

Participant Training and Support. How will participants be trained, supported, or otherwise prepared for their assignments or placements? Describe the key elements of the participant training, in-service education, or service-learning curriculum employed to improve participants' skills, prepare them for placement, and foster positive civic values.

Participant Placement and Supervision. How will participants be placed (in teams, small groups, or individuals) and matched with assignments. Rural Development Team Members may be placed individually; however, they must be within a 50 mile radius or a one hour drive. Furthermore, a cluster site must be established and teams members must meet once a month at this site. This monthly meeting can be used in several ways, i.e., training, or team projects. In the case of PL&E teams, they must be kept in teams and must always have adequate supervision. Rural Development Team Members can be included in your design to use as crew leaders who will be able to assist with supervision. How will service sponsors or host-sites be oriented and prepared for placement of Members? This is an important issue, so be sure to cover it sufficiently.

5. Objectives:

Each Rural Development Team Member performing an individual task must have an individual community service objective. Each Anti-Hunger and Environmental Team site must have at least five objectives. Each objective must be in the proper format, all questions answered and be measurable.

COMMUNITY SERVICE OBJECTIVES Objective 1

Grantee Name: _____

Site: _____

SITE SUPERVISOR: _____

PHONE: _____

COUNTY: _____

COMPONENTS OF OBJECTIVE STATEMENT:

1. What work will be done? What service activities will your members engage in?

2. What is the hoped for result of the work/activities described above?

3. How will you measure the quality of your product or impact of your service?

4. By what standard will you gauge success?

5. How many Individuals will receive the benefit of the work your members perform?

Below are some examples of unacceptable Community Service objectives:

Member training.
Fundraising.
Public relations work.

We fully realize that the community service objectives are most difficult to craft for Rural Development Team projects. These objectives must clarify precisely how community members will directly benefit from the service of AmeriCorps Members -- not how many meetings will be held, how many research reports will be written, how many plans will be formulated, how much data will be collected, or how many people will learn about USDA programs.

Community service objectives should stay away from vague buzzwords such as "facilitating partnerships", "broadening public understanding", etc. Rather, the objectives should focus on how many trees will be planted, how many people will receive better housing, how much the recycling rate will be increased, how many new small-scale farms will be created, how many more people will receive running water, how many students will receive educational presentations, how many new businesses and jobs will be created, how water quality will be improved, how many new tourists will be brought to an area, etc.

The objectives must clarify how each AmeriCorps Member has a distinct service project with distinct goals that are different from the existing work of the sponsoring USDA agency, RC&D Council, county agency, or community group. Too many draft objectives gave the false impression that AmeriCorps Members will simply be supplementing the workforces of our agencies or partner organizations.

Each objective must realistically relate the service to be performed to the final goal. For instance, an objective cannot simply state that a Member will create a tourism plan for the area, and that such a plan will create 1,000 new jobs. The objective needs to explain precisely how the member will not just plan, but actually help implement, concrete activities that directly create 1,000 jobs.

Each objective must define an impartial way of assessing the quality of the service to be performed. It is unacceptable to use vague language indicating that, somehow, everyone will be satisfied. Rather, if the objective relates to education, the objective should predict specific percentile increases in test scores on that topic. If the objective relates to recycling, the objective should predict the actual decrease in the number of tons of waste weighed-in annually at the county landfill.

Lastly, each objective must state exactly how many community residents will receive the direct benefits from the service performed by our AmeriCorps Members. It is unacceptable to simply make the claim that an AmeriCorps project will somehow benefit everyone in a town or a county, and then list under the number of people served the total population of the town or county. Rather, this number should reflect a carefully thought out prediction of how many people will be concretely aided by the direct service of AmeriCorps.



Applications for Renewal

Sponsors that have an approved project and wish to renew must submit the following:

1. A letter of intent to renew.
2. Quarterly Report (most recent).
3. Title Page:
 - a) Title of Project
 - b) Name of Organization
 - c) Team Type (PL&E or RDT or Combined)
 - d) State of duty station of AmeriCorps Members
 - e) County of duty station of AmeriCorps Members
 - f) Names of counties served by Members (up to 15 counties)
 - g) Congressional District of duty station of Members
 - h) Name of site supervisor (at local or county level)
 - i) Address, phone number, and fax number of site supervisor
 - j) Name of State Project Director
 - k) Address, phone number & fax number of State Project Director
 - l) Number of Members in Environmental Teams
 - m) Number of Members in Rural Development Teams
4. Summary Page (one page overview):
 - a) Exactly what specific accomplishments were achieved in the first half year of the project in meeting the community service objectives and boosting the personal development of the members.
 - b) The key elements of the program design for next year. Specifically describe each new service project to be performed by the Members. Describe any major changes in management structure or partner organizations.

5. Objectives:

Each Rural Development Team Project must have at least one objective. Each Environmental Team Project must have at least three objectives. Objectives must be in the proper format, answer all five questions and be measurable.

Objectives are one of the most critical parts of your application. If they are not specific, if they are not measurable, or if they do not show a direct benefit to the community, they will not be accepted.

COMMUNITY SERVICE OBJECTIVES

Objective 1

Grantee Name: _____

Site: _____

SITE SUPERVISOR: _____

PHONE: _____

COUNTY: _____

COMPONENTS OF OBJECTIVE STATEMENT:

1. What work will be done? What service activities will your members engage in?

2. What is the hoped for result of the work/activities described above?

3. How will you measure the quality of your product or impact of your service?

4. By what standard will you gauge success?

5. How many Individuals will receive the benefit of the work your members perform?

Below are some examples of unacceptable Community Service objectives:

Member training, Fundraising, or Public relations activities



Renewals are not automatic.

Serious consideration will be given to:

1. Accomplishments during the project's first year,
2. Challenges met and overcome during the first year, and
3. Clear objectives for the second year.

Chapter Six

Roles & Responsibilities

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

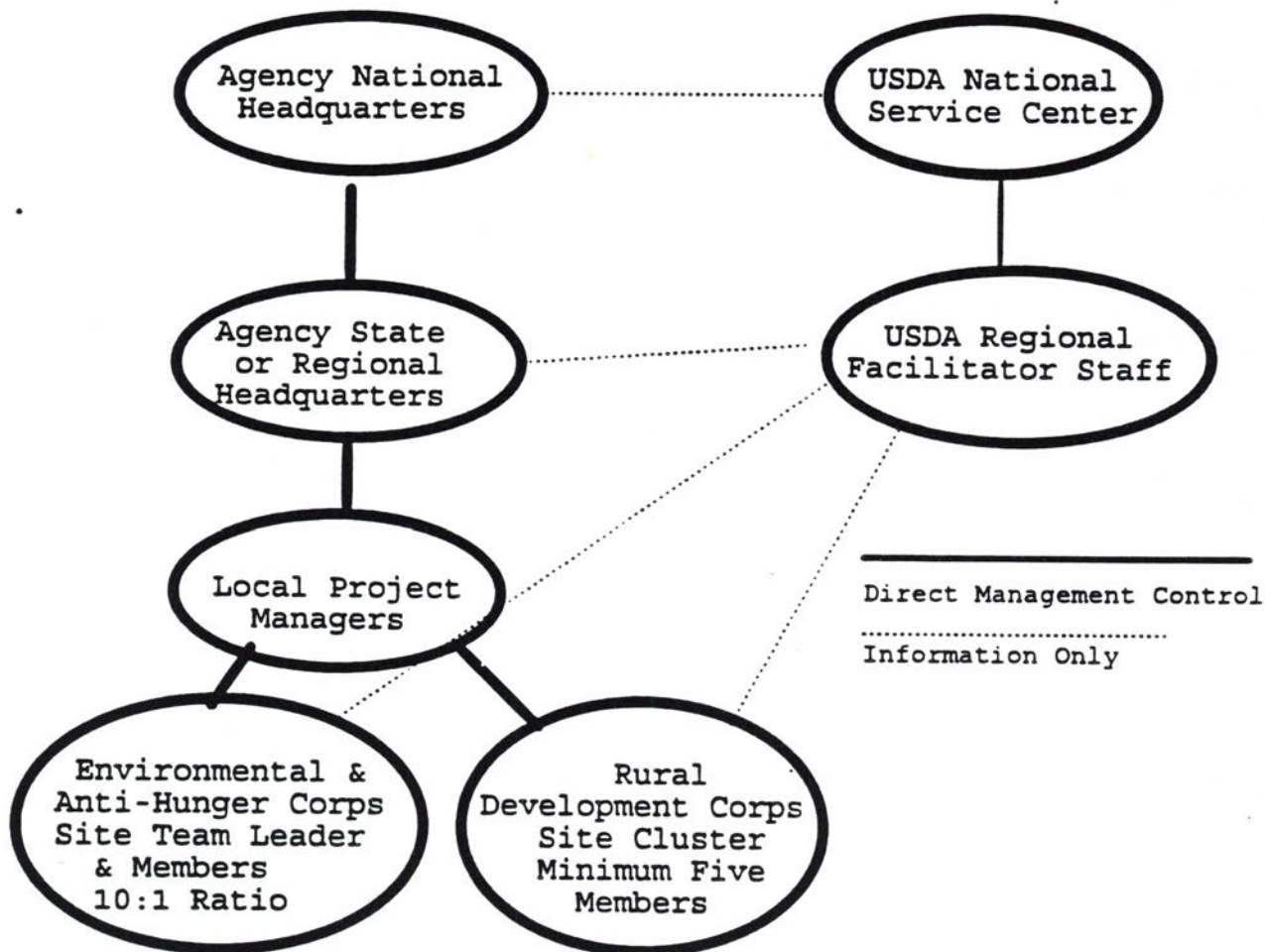
The CNCS is responsible for:

- issuing rules and regulations for the National Service program;
- review and selection of project applications;
- processing of education awards;
- providing program technical expertise; and
- monitoring and evaluating projects.

State Commission for National and Community Service

The State Commissions are responsible for State National Service Programs. They are available for technical assistance. They may set up training for Members or they may help to sponsor training for Members. They have no statutory authority regarding USDA projects. However, Project Directors are required to consult and highly encouraged to cooperate with the State Commissions. It can prove to be beneficial to USDA project managers and our AmeriCorps Members.

Team USDA AmeriCorps — Management Structure
 Public Lands and Environment corps
 Rural Development Corps
 Anti-Hunger Corps





Office of the Secretary of Agriculture
(Director of National Service - USDA)

USDA shall have responsibility for:

- submission of consolidated agency applications to the CNCS;
- working with USDA agencies to develop applications;
- working with agencies to establish USDA AmeriCorps policy and to provide related guidance;
- serving as liaison with the CNCS;
- developing recruitment and training material;
- serving as the Congressional liaison;
- monitoring USDA projects through the national agency offices;
- coordinating public communications;
- coordinating intergovernmental relations;
- coordinating between USDA agencies; and
- ensuring one Departmental identity for the program.



Agency National Headquarters

National headquarters is responsible for:

- working with the Department to develop policy and guidelines;
- working with States/regions on potential USDA AmeriCorps project development;
- disseminating policy and guidelines to the field;
- monitoring and evaluating projects;
- allocating funds;
- developing operational manuals and training information;
- liaison with the Department and the CNCS; and
- line management for the AmeriCorps Program.

Agency State and Regional Offices

The Regional Foresters, Regional Conservationists, Area Directors, and State Conservationists are responsible for:

- overall program management and implementation at the State or Regional level;
- project review and submission to national agencies;
- providing administrative support and any necessary training; and
- line management for the AmeriCorps Program.



Agency Project Director

Project Directors are responsible for:

- serving as liaison between national headquarters and the local level;
- ensuring project managers are in compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations;
- ensuring that members' needs are being met; and
- line management for the AmeriCorps Program.

Agency Project Managers (local level)

The local office is responsible for:

- specific project development, planning, design, submission to state level;
- building partnerships with local organizations; and
- following of applicable laws, policies, regulations, and guidelines, day-to-day project management and supervision.



Regional Facilitators

While the role of Regional Facilitators may change greatly next year, their current duties are:

- planning and managing regional training and orientation programs;
- planning and developing regional communications activities;
- helping to ensure USDA/AmeriCorps members establish a national identity;
- providing coordination with Anti-Hunger and Public Lands and Environment Corps where appropriate;
- providing leaderships in developing Internet capabilities;
- participating in identifying and recommending methods and criteria to improve USDA/AmeriCorps procedures;
- participating in planning for future USDA/AmeriCorps activities and projects, and
- consulting with state and/or regional offices and facilitating cluster meetings.

Responsibilities of all USDA AmeriCorps Staff

All USDA employees in appropriate circumstances shall be guided by the following:

- have selected all AmeriCorps Members in an impartial and non-discriminatory manner that bolsters AmeriCorps vision of diversity;
- provide AmeriCorps Members with approved handbooks, documents, and forms needed to follow the provisions of AmeriCorps and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993;
- provide AmeriCorps Members with the orientation, training, technical assistance, and supervision necessary to complete their service activities;
- provide all AmeriCorps Members with ongoing education and instruction needed not only to perform their specific service projects, but to grow and develop as citizens, community problem-solvers, and developing professionals;
- design and coordinate service projects so that the members will continuously have productive and useful service projects in environmental or human needs;
- structure work schedules to ensure that AmeriCorps Members will be reasonably able to perform 1,700 hours of service within a year;
- treat all members with respect and provide them with a reasonable amount of guidance, support, discipline, and counseling required to perform AmeriCorps service;
- work with members to develop mechanisms through which they can have significant input and impact upon service assignments, rules of conduct, and all other aspects of the AmeriCorps; and
- provide other additional support and services to ensure the success of all programs.



Crew Leaders

Crew leaders are responsible for:

- daily supervision and work schedules

Members

Members are responsible for:

- completion of assigned work plan and tasks;
- coordinating with designated community leaders; and
- attending training and AmeriCorps meetings as scheduled.



Member Rules of Conduct

The member agrees to act in conformance with, and abide by, all current and future rules and procedures established by USDA. Members must not misuse government property and must conform to the specific limitations of use of such property while on official Federal government business.

(a) The member is expected to, at all times while acting in an official capacity as an AmeriCorps Member:

- (1) demonstrate mutual respect toward others;
- (2) follow directions;
- (3) direct concerns, problems, and suggestions to the appropriate program official; and
- (4) not engage in any activity involving proselytizing or assisting religious organizations, attempting to influence legislation or an election or aid a partisan political organization, helping or hindering union activity, or aiding a business organized for profit.



(b) At no time may the member:

(1) engage in personal use of government vehicles, property, tools, equipment, or telephones;

(2) possess or use any and all forms of addictive or hallucinatory drugs, including, but not limited to amphetamines, barbiturates, cocaine, marijuana, etc.;

(3) consume or be under the influence of intoxicating beverages on or in government-owned or leased property/vehicles: or transportation of such beverages in government vehicles;

(4) use abusive, vulgar, and discriminatory language, including verbal/sexual harassment toward fellow members, staff, supervisors, or other official contacts;

(5) destroy government or personal property of others;

(6) fail to comply with a supervisor's instructions, unless these instructions are clearly illegal or unsafe;

(7) transport family members, pets, or any unauthorized personnel in government vehicles;

(8) engage in any activity that is illegal under local, State, or Federal law;

(9) engage in activities that pose a significant safety risk to others.



(c) The member understands that the following acts will also constitute a violation of the Program's rule of conduct:

- (1) unauthorized tardiness;
- (2) unauthorized absences;
- (3) repeated use of inappropriate language (i.e. profanity) at job site;
- (4) failure to wear appropriate clothing to service assignments;
- (5) stealing or lying;
- (6) engaging in activity that may physically or emotionally damage other members of the program or members of the community; or
- (7) failure to notify the Program of any criminal arrest or conviction that occurs during the term of service.



Third Party Sponsors

Third party sponsors are responsible for

- Compliance with all laws and restraints as outlined in the legislation and rules and regulations published by the CNCS. They are to receive a copy of this manual - the USDA AmeriCorps Operations Manual - to use as a reference.
- Complying with the non-displacement clause of the law. This means that employees cannot be displaced due to the use of AmeriCorps Members.
- Appropriate supervision of AmeriCorps Members when a Federal supervisor is not on site. Members are required by law to serve 1700 hours of direct community service and supervisors are accepting legal responsibilities for this certification. Officials who are responsible for certification of time and attendance should be cognizant of the legal responsibilities of this task. It is not to be taken lightly by any supervisor.
- Ensuring that members are engaged in appropriate service activities as approved in the community service objectives agreed upon prior to the start of the program. Federal program managers should ensure that partners are aware of and knowledgeable of approved objectives.
- Any project unique training requirements that would not have been provided by any other entity, i.e. Federal agency, CNCS, State Commission.
- In cases where the third-party is a non-Federal entity and is responsible for directly supervising the members, the third party is responsible for providing workers' compensation and liability insurance coverage for the AmeriCorps Members.