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AMERICORPS OPERATIONS MANUAL



UNITED
STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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.

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.



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Chapter Four

Cooperative Agreements

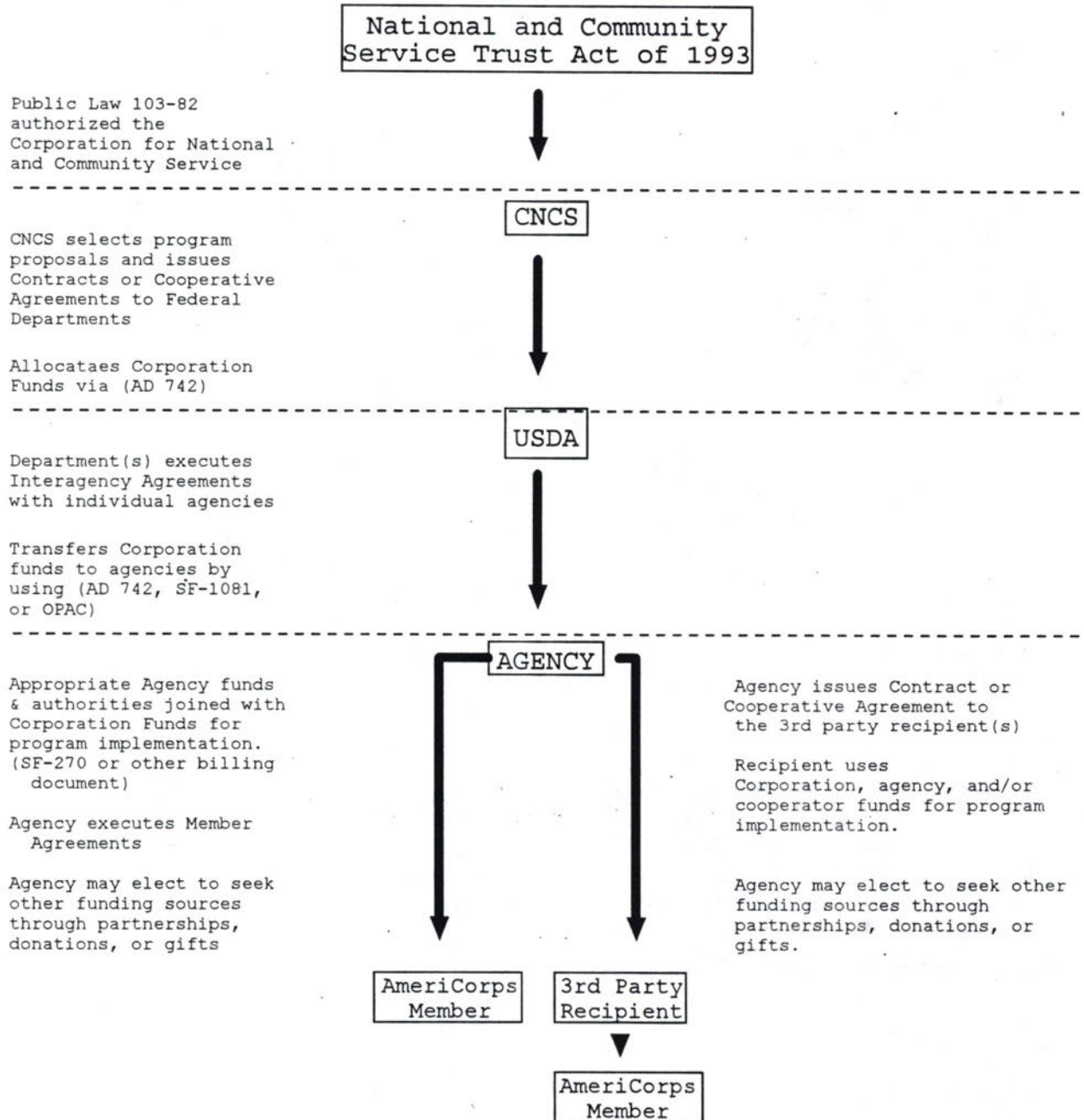
The Act

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.

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)

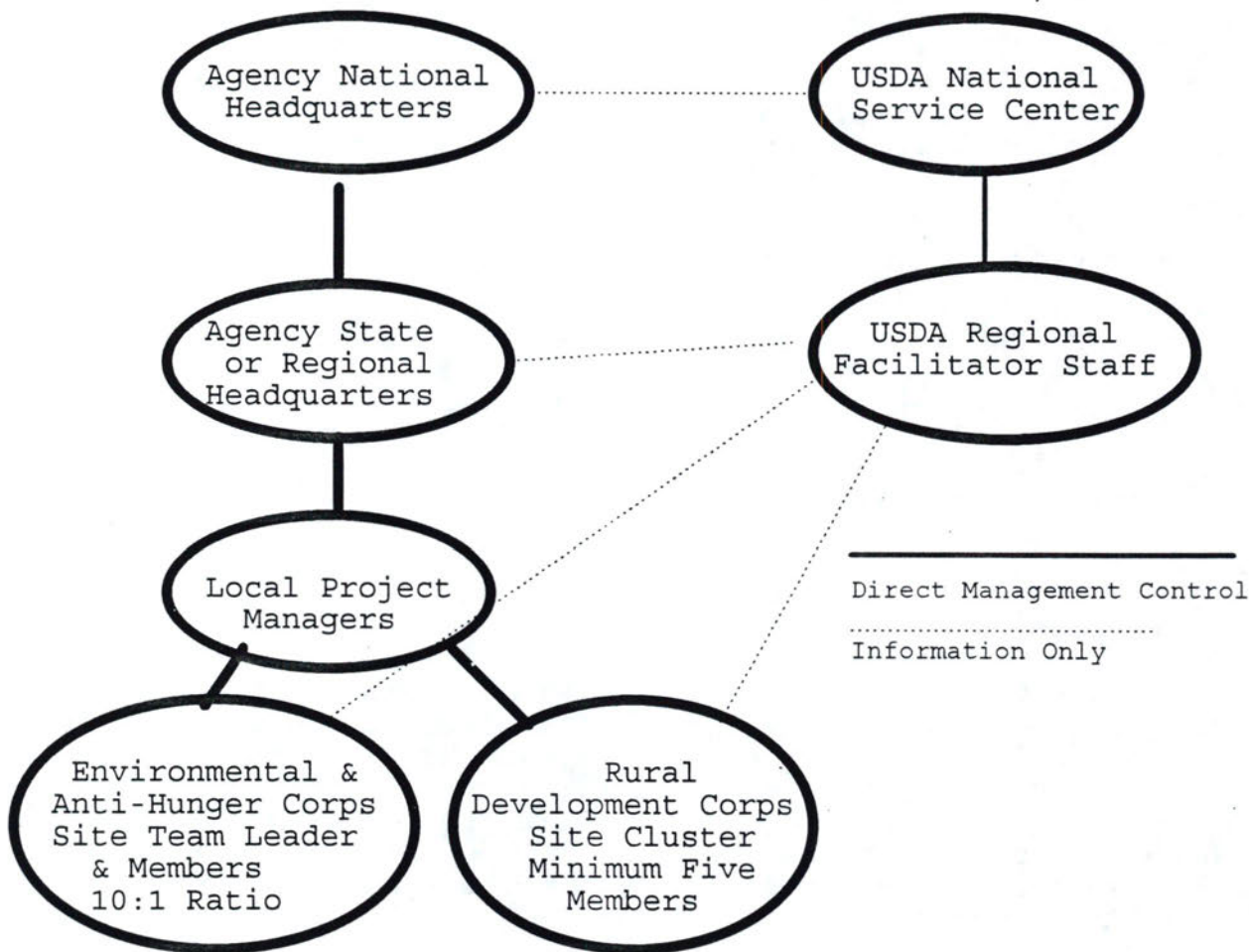
The CNCS is responsible for:

- 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.



Chapter Seven

Recruitment/Selection

Start-Up

Recruitment can begin once the Agency has been notified of selection for an AmeriCorps/USDA Project by CNCS and the USDA Director of National Service. No members should be formally selected or renewed until the sites receive this formal notification. At Appendix G is a checklist for project directors and managers that may be helpful in getting started. The CNCS will launch a media campaign to advertise the recruitment phase. The Office of National Service will assist with recruitment by sending Public Service Announcements to the media and providing recruitment material to all project sites.

Project managers need to send out press releases for local press (example at Appendix E).

Each site needs to develop a recruitment plan (example at Appendix F). This plan should detail exactly how managers plan to obtain a high quality and diverse group of applications. The plan needs to specify how managers will go beyond usual contacts, i.e., friends, family, and associates of USDA employees. Submit recruitment plans to the USDA Director of National Service.



The plan should reflect a detailed timetable for each task, such as:

- how and where recruitment brochures and posters will be distributed;
- civic groups or summer youth programs to which presentations will be made;
- specify the meetings which will be held with guidance counselors, principals, clergymen, college department chairs, college and vocational school financial aid officers, college student activities coordinators, school community service coordinators, and other community leaders;
- specify community events where exhibits will be held; and
- state how and when finalists will personally be interviewed.

Eligibility

Anyone over 17 years of age (or 16 in a Youth Corps program), is a U.S. citizen or a lawful permanent resident alien, has a high school diploma, a GED or agrees in writing to get one, and has a sincere desire to perform national service, is eligible to be a member in this program.

Relocation Costs

USDA will not pay any costs due to relocation. For example, if a Member living in New York applies for a position in California and is accepted, that individual is responsible for his/her relocation costs.



Former AmeriCorps Members

If a project sponsor wishes to recruit a current or past AmeriCorps Member, they should have that member submit a new application. Members are not automatically enrolled for another term. They must apply and compete for each term they wish to serve. Project managers must make the determination of whether or not to renew a member in the Americorps Program.

Recruitment Pools

The CNCS will maintain a database of potential applicants which may be used as a source for recruitment. Program managers can tap this source in one of two ways:

1. contact NHQ with zip codes for potential geographic recruitment areas. NHQ will obtain the list of applicants and forward to you.
2. contact CNCS directly by calling Bruce Cohen at (202) 606-5000, extension 249.

Each project should try to select approximately 20 percent of the members from the Corporation's recruitment pool. The pool will include names from your area.

The USDA Office of National Service will also operate an 800 line to obtain names of interested applicants. USDA will provide these names to local project managers.



Diversity

The goal at each site should be to receive four applications from a socioeconomic mix of people for every member eventually accepted. In other words, if you have a 20 person project, you should attempt to obtain at least 80 applications. You should make it clear to all applicants that there will be a tough competition to get accepted to the program. Yet you should make sure that applicants know they will not be judged so much on their past education or accomplishments as they will on their sincere desire to work hard at performing community service.

While USDA projects will absolutely not have recruitment quotas, each program should have the basic look and feel of the people who live in that region. For instance, a program in Vermont should have a diverse mix of Anglo-Americans and Americans of French descent. A program in the District of Columbia or Chicago or Los Angeles should have a diverse mix of African-Americans, Caucasians, Latinos, and Asians. A program in South Dakota should have a diverse mix of Caucasians and Native Americans.

All projects should seek people with a diverse mix of educational levels, ranging from high school dropouts to technical school and college graduates. All projects should recruit people with a diverse level of family income. (There is no income eligibility for this program.) Projects should have a mix of males, females, and members with disabilities.

While it may be difficult to achieve the recruitment goals outlined above, diversity is fundamental to our program. Your recruitment plan should specify the exact ways you will take steps to obtain diverse applicants.



Nondiscrimination

You may not discriminate against any participant, program staff, or service recipient on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, political affiliation, or disability. Under Federal law, you are required to conduct a self-evaluation regarding accessibility for individuals with disabilities and discrimination on the basis of sex. You must also comply with applicable state nondiscrimination laws.

We urge you to reach out to participants who can contribute a diverse set of perceptions, skills, and life experiences to your program team. In all cases, your selection process must be based on the qualifications of your applicants - whether they can perform the essential project activities - with or without reasonable accommodation of their mental or physical disabilities. If you have applicants who are qualified, but have disabilities, you have an obligation by law and under the grant to provide reasonable accommodation to enable them to participate. You do not have to enroll someone who is unqualified or who poses a direct threat to the health or safety to others (that cannot be eliminated through reasonable accommodation). Nor do you have to make accommodations which are unduly burdensome or will fundamentally alter your program design.

Member Selection

The project director, in consultation with agency line officers, is responsible for selecting members.



Members with Criminal or Juvenile Records

Applicants with criminal records have not been restricted from participation in the program. A determination must be made on a case-by-case basis.

However, if your program provides service in particularly sensitive areas, such as working with young children, you should consider whether the participation of individuals with certain criminal backgrounds would have a significant negative impact on the physical or psychological health of other members or individuals served. Similarly, you should carefully consider the impact of participation by an individual convicted of a violent felony or an offense related to the project activities (for example, someone with a burglary record where the program repairs the homes of elderly residents). The same recommendations apply for someone adjudicated as a juvenile offender.

You should be aware that some states have laws related to placing individuals with criminal records in activities involving children. You also should be aware that programs could be held liable for any negative consequences resulting from inadequate screening of members in particularly sensitive areas.



Chapter Eight

Personnel and Administrative Issues

General

AmeriCorps Members are not Federal employees: however, for the purpose of administration, USDA/AmeriCorps members will often follow many of the same processes used for regular employees.

Participant Application

USDA will use the Team USDA AmeriCorps Application Form AD 1099 (4/95) (copy at Appendix H).

Benefits to AmeriCorps Members

- living allowance during service;
- child care allowance (if eligible);
- basic health insurance (if eligible);
- educational award worth \$4,725. This can be used for college, job training, or repayment of qualified student loans;
- for full-time member excused absence (40 hours) and Federal holidays; and
- for part-time members excused absence (20 hours) and four Federal holidays.

AmeriCorps Members are NOT Federal employees. Their service in AmeriCorps does not count toward retirement nor does it give them any special status if once they leave the program they apply for a job as a Federal employee.

Living Allowance

Living allowance disbursement will be determined based upon 1,812 hours for full-time Members. For part-time members it will be based on 952 hours. Members are not subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act and will not receive premium or overtime pay.

Living allowance rates for USDA/AmeriCorps Full-time members for FY 96 are:

	Allowance	Hourly	Pay period
Environmental Team	\$7,945	4.39 x 80	= \$351.20
Anti-Hunger Team	\$7,945	4.39 x 80	= \$351.20
Rural Development Team	\$12,000	6.62 x 80	= \$529.60

Living allowance rates for USDA/AmeriCorps part-time members for FY 96 are:

	Allowance	Hourly	Pay period
Environmental Team	\$4,206	4.41 x 80	= \$362.80
Anti-Hunger Team	\$4,206	4.41 x 80	= \$362.80
Rural Development Team	\$6,352	6.67 x 80	= \$533.60

Members participating in a residential program may be subject to a commissary deduction.

Effect of Living Allowance on Other Programs

The question has arisen as to how the AmeriCorps living allowance is treated for purposes of determining an AmeriCorps Member's eligibility for benefits under the Social Security Act, including AFDC, Medicare, Medicaid, and SSI benefits. The National and Community Service Act of 1990, as amended, deals with this issue in a rather indirect fashion:

Treatment of benefits. Section 142(b) of the Job Training Partnership Act [29 U.S.C.A. §1552(b)] shall apply to the projects conducted under this subchapter as such projects were conducted under the Job Training Partnership Act [29 U.S.C.A. § 1501 et seq.]

42 U.S.C. § 12637(d). Section 142(b) of the Job Training Partnership Act provides as follows:

Allowances, earnings and payments to individuals participating in programs under this chapter shall not be considered as income for the purposes of determining eligibility for the amount of income transfer and in-kind aid furnished under any Federal or federally assisted program based on need, other than as provided under the Social Security Act [42 U.S.C.A. 301 et seq.]

29 U.S.C. § 1552. The Department of Health and Human services has ruled that AmeriCorps benefits will be taken into account in determining eligibility for programs under the Social Security Act, including SSI, Medicaid, Medicare, and AFDC. However, AmeriCorps benefits may not be taken into account in determining eligibility for and the amounts of other needs-based Federal Programs, including Food Stamps, Public Housing, Federal Student Aid, and others.

Food Stamp Eligibility

Below is a boilerplate paragraph that may be useful to you and/or your State/regional/local contacts in informing AmeriCorps Members about their possible eligibility to receive food stamp benefits.

AmeriCorps Members who wish to apply for food stamps must:

- 1) TELL the eligibility worker that they are AmeriCorps Members, and
- 2) take the necessary information to the office with them (see sample paragraph below).

It is critical that they report the income, even though the worker will turn right around and exclude it; otherwise, it could be construed as a "misrepresentation of circumstances" or "food stamp fraud".

This applies to any of the other means-tested programs (i.e., programs that have an income eligibility requirement) administered by FNS -- WIC, Child and Adult Care Feeding, School Lunch/Breakfast, and the Summer Food Service Program, to name a few. Thus the sample paragraph on the following page can generally be interpreted to refer to those other programs as well as to the Food Stamp Program that it specifically mentions.

Sample Paragraph

The Food Stamp Program helps low-income people buy the food they need for good health. Eligibility is on a household basis, that is, people who live together and purchase food and prepare meals together are included in one household. When a household applies for food stamps at the local food stamp office, an application must be filled out that reports all income the household receives. Most income is counted in determining the household's eligibility and the amount of benefits the household will receive, but some types of income are not counted. For example, stipends and educational income received under an AmeriCorps program are not counted. To get this exclusion, you will be asked to show proof that the money comes from an AmeriCorps program. This proof may be a document provided by the AmeriCorps program that shows what type of payment it is or, if you do not have such proof, you may have the food stamp office call the (local) AmeriCorps office for you.

Living Allowance Waivers

The Department of Health and Human Services has ruled that the living allowance will be taken into consideration in determining eligibility for and the amount of assistance from programs under the Social Security Act, including SSI, Medicaid, Medicare, and AFDC. A significant number of AmeriCorps Members are recipients of SSI or AFDC who fear losing that assistance because of the living allowance. For those members, the Corporation will waive the living allowance requirement, with the following caveats. First, the member must understand that each State has different regulations applying HHS rules, and that even if the member waives his or her right to receive the living allowance, the State may still consider the amount of the living allowance that the member is eligible to receive. Second, the member may revoke the waiver at any time during the course of the program. Finally, if the member revokes the waiver, he or she may only begin receiving the living allowance from the date on which the waiver was revoked; the member may not receive any portion of the living allowance that accrued during the waiver period. Appendix I is a waiver form for the member to sign if they decide to waive the living allowance.

Work Study

Effect of living allowance on a member's work study and other student assistance - work-study is a Federal needs-based program administered through post-secondary institutions to provide students with part-time employment during school attendance. A member's living allowance will not affect work-study eligibility or eligibility for any other Federal student aid. The CNCS has asked financial aid officers not to take the living allowance into account in determining other financial aid. However, there is no guarantee that the living allowance will be disregarded in determining eligibility for State aid or private scholarships.

Child Care

AmeriCorps child care benefits include assistance in:

1. identifying child care; and
2. payment of child care costs based on a regional allowance.

Child care benefits are available for all full-time members who are income eligible and whose children are younger than 13 years of age. These benefits will pay for a variety of types of approved child care including family child care and center-based child care. Considering child care needs, members should plan for transportation time to and from work sites in addition to scheduled work hours. These benefits cover 100 percent of a pre-determined allowance or the actual cost of the care, whichever is less. The allowance is based on the local rates of the Child Care & Development Block Grant, a federally funded, state administered program that differs from state to state and community to community.

(See information at Appendix J)

Summary of Benefits

- timely, direct payment of child care costs to approved child care provider based on the pre-determined allowance;
- consultation with a child development specialist located in the community where child care is needed;
- detailed review of all available child care options in the community where child care is needed;
- consumer information about the quality of child care and how to identify it; and
- materials and resources, including checklists for the visit to child care providers, charts identifying milestones in child development and other helpful materials.

Overview of Responsibilities

Project managers and/or supervisors are responsible for determining a member's eligibility for child care benefits. The process consists of the following steps:

1. Orientation - project managers should provide an orientation regarding child care benefits. Two reasons for this step is to:

- provide the member with the information needed to successfully choose a child care provider. Thoroughly describe and explain the benefits and materials which will be provided by AmeriCorps Care.
- to gather essential information to determine the member's eligibility for child care benefits. Ensure that the AmeriCorps Care application is completed and obtain current income information (obtain pay stubs from the most current four weeks prior to the review).

2. Verification - to review eligibility information by checking all child care applications and review eligibility based on family size, computation of family income, verification of hours in program, and child care payments from other sources.

3. Certification - ensure that the member meets the following criteria:

- The member must reside with and be a parent or guardian of a child or children under the age of 13.
- The total family income must be within the state's eligibility limits for CCDBG for a family of that size.
- The member is not receiving child care assistance from other sources.
- The member needs child care in order to participate in program.

After completion of these three steps, project managers should fax or mail signed application of the eligible member(s) to the AmeriCorps Care.

4. Obligation/Authorization - provide each eligible member with an AmeriCorps Care parent packet. Within this packet is a three-party contact agreement which, when signed by provider, parent, and project manager, authorizes child care services to begin immediately.

5. Compensation - AmeriCorps Care will administer a payment system, forwarding child care payments directly to approved child care providers on a monthly basis. Providers will be required to verify services for the prior month and forward a child care coupon to AmeriCorps Care. AmeriCorps Care will forward payment directly to child care providers within five working days of receiving the completed coupon.

For technical assistance, project managers and supervisors may contact AmeriCorps Care at 1-800-570-4543, 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM, EST, Monday through Friday. This number is **not** for member use.

Members may contact AmeriCorps Care at (202) 393-1135, 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM, EST, Monday through Friday.



Worker's Compensation

For the purposes of the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA), if members are managed directly by Federal employees, we are to consider them as being covered. Each agency should process the appropriate Department of Labor forms as it would for a USDA employee.

Members who are in programs sponsored by USDA but are directly supervised (and usually payrolled) by a non-Federal third party must have workers' compensation payments made for them by the third party to the appropriate state.

Liability

For the purposes of the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA), if members are directly managed by Federal employees, we are to consider them as being covered where they are acting in the scope of their employment on behalf of USDA in an official capacity. The ultimate determination is within the discretion of the Department of Justice and must be made on a case-by-case basis under the particular facts of each case. All incidents should be handled under normal FTCA procedures.

All non-Federal third parties operating programs in conjunction with USDA who directly supervise the members must provide liability insurance coverage for the members.

Insurance

USDA will provide health insurance for AmeriCorps members. There will be no cost share by the member. Members can enroll at anytime during the program. This insurance is optional to the member, covers only the member, and does not cover any dependents. A policy will be obtained by CNCS and the payment will be made by the National Finance Center. (Appendix K)

There is no life insurance coverage.

Unemployment Benefits

Members are not considered Federal employees for this benefit and are not eligible to receive unemployment benefits.

Garnishment of Wages

Procedures for garnishment of wages is the same as for an employee. The procedure is that a court order is issued and forwarded to the agency office charged with handling such matters. Agency personnel should contact the Research and Operations Division of the Office of the General Counsel (202) 720-2320 when processing garnishment orders for AmeriCorps Members. There is some question as to whether or not an AmeriCorps living allowance is considered "pay" for the purposes of legislation that allows garnishment.

Employee Assistance Program

Members are not considered Federal employees for this benefit and are not eligible to receive assistance. However, assistance program counselors may be asked for advice as to whom the AmeriCorps Member may contact to seek assistance.

Educational Awards

After a member completes his/her term of service, they will be eligible for an educational award that can be used in the following ways:

- to repay qualified existing or future student loans;
- to pay all or part of the cost of attending an institution of higher education (including certain vocational programs); or
- to pay expenses incurred while participating in an approved school-to-work program.

The award can be divided up and used only for authorized educational expenditures. A member could apply a portion to an existing qualified student loan and save the remainder to pay for authorized college costs a few years later. Educational awards will be held in the National Trust for seven years. A member may apply for an extension if during the seven-year period, they perform another term of service in an approved AmeriCorps position, or if they were unavoidable prevented from using the award. Education awards are subject to income taxes in the year they are used.

Members must serve a minimum of 15 percent of their term of service in order to receive a pro-rata share of the educational award.

In general most personal loans taken out by individuals to cover education expenses that are NOT qualified loans can NOT be paid off using the post service education award. The institution which made the loan can tell you if the loan is "qualified".



The post service education award CAN'T be transferred to anyone else. A child can't transfer it to a parent to pay off loans the parent took out to pay the child's educational expenses. A parent can't transfer it to a child or spouse or relative to pay for that person's educational expenses. In general, the education award can't be used to pay off PLUS loans.

The law prevents the USDA/AmeriCorps Program from offering the option of making a cash payment in lieu of the post service education award administered through the National Trust.

In most cases, the post service education award of \$4,725 is taxable in the calendar year in which it is used. The Corporation will deduct no taxes but you will be sent a Form 1099 to be used in preparing your taxes.

In most cases, the post service education award does NOT count as aid received when computing your eligibility for other financial assistance for education. The education award is in addition to any other financial aid you would have been eligible for if you had not served in AmeriCorps.

Prior to using the education award, the member agrees (in the event the member has not yet received a high school diploma or its equivalent, including an alternative diploma or certificate for individuals with learning disabilities) to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent (unless the member is enrolled in an institution of higher education on an ability to benefit basis or the program has waived the requirement due to the results of the member's education assessment).



The member understands that his/her failure to disclose to the program any history of having been released for cause from another AmeriCorps Program will render the member ineligible to receive the education award.

If the member has received forbearance on a qualified student loan during the term of service, and the member successfully completes the term of service, the National Service Trust will repay any interest that accrued on the loan during the term of service.

Qualified Student Loans

Below is a partial list of qualified student loans under the AmeriCorps Educational Awards and the Loan Forbearance programs. Essentially, all student loans under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (except for loans made to parents of students) and Titles VII and VIII of the Public Service Health Act are qualified student loans under the AmeriCorps Education awards and Loan Forbearance programs.

Please note that the list provided below is not exhaustive because the names of the student loans frequently change or the local lenders have given different names to certain loans. If the AmeriCorps Members in your program have student loans that are not listed below, please have them check with their lenders to see if it falls under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 or Titles VII and VIII of the Public Service Health Act.

Title IV of the Higher Education Act

Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFEL) - these loans are insured by the Department of Education. (Since FFEL loans are privately issued, they may be referred to by another name by the loan holder.)

Federal Consolidation Loans
Federal PLUS Loans - excluding those made to parents
Federal Stafford Loans
Federally Insured Student Loans - ended in 1984
Guaranteed Student Loans - former name for Stafford Loans
Supplemental Loans for Students (SLS)

Federal Direct Student Loan Program (FDSLP) - The Department of Education is the lender.

Federal Direct PLUS Loans
Federal Direct Stafford Loans

Federal Perkins Loans - This is a campus based program.

National Defense Student Loan Program
National Direct Student Loan Program
Income Contingent Loan Program

Title VII of the Public Service Health Act

Health Education Assistance Loan Program (HEAL)

Health Professions Student Loan Program (HPSL)

Primary Care Loans (PCL)
Loans for Disadvantaged Students (LDS)

Title VIII of the Public Service Health Act

Nursing Student Loan Program (NSL)

Deferment of Student Loans

Individuals serving in an approved position in Americorps, the National Service Program, are entitled to forbearance on qualified student loans during their terms of service. This benefit is intended to enable individuals with outstanding debt to participate in AmeriCorps, the National Service Program established by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-82).

This law amended the Higher Education Act to provide that:

"upon written request, a lender shall grant a borrower forbearance on such terms as are otherwise consistent with the regulations of the Secretary [of Education], during periods in which the borrower is serving in a national service position, for which the borrower receives a national service educational award under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993."

The Department of Education has further incorporated this statutory mandate into its implementing regulations. The final regulations governing the Federal Family Education Loan Program (34 CFR Part 682) provides for mandatory forbearance for such a borrower "in yearly increments (or a lesser period equal to the actual period during which the borrower is eligible)." In the future, the Department will incorporate further regulatory references to this mandatory forbearance requirement for Perkins' loans.

The Department of Health and Human Services is developing policy guidance to notify schools, lenders, and holders that loans made pursuant to Title VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act are similarly eligible for forbearance during any periods of service with the national service program.

The CNCS shall pay the interest that has accrued on the qualified student loans of any person in an approved national service position during their term of service, pursuant to Section 148(e) of the National and Community Service Trust Act. Interest will be paid to the lender at the end of the term upon the successful completion of service by the borrower in a national service program. Members who fail to complete the full term will generally be liable for the accrued interest. In some instances, individuals may leave service early for compelling personal circumstances, and the Corporation will also pay accrued interest during the term of service. Otherwise, individuals who leave the program early are responsible for paying the accrued interest.

Qualified student loans for which the Corporation will pay accrued interest costs are:

"any loan made, insured, or guaranteed pursuant to title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070 et seq.), other than a loan to a parent of a student pursuant to section 428B of such Act (20 U.S.C. 1078-2);" and

"any loan made pursuant to title VII or VIII of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 292a et seq.)."

In general, the Department of Education loans that are covered include:

- (a) Federal Family Education Loan Program,
 - Federal Consolidation Loans,
 - Federal PLUS Loans (excluding those made to parents)
 - Federal Stafford Loans
 - Federally Insured Student Loans (1984 and prior)
 - Guaranteed Student Loans (former name for Stafford Loans)
 - Supplemental Loans for Students



- (b) Federal Direct Student Loan Program (FDSLPL)
- (c) Federal Perkins Loans
 - National Defense Student Loan Program (NDSL)
 - National Direct Student Loan Program (NDSL)
 - Income Contingent Loan Program

For purposes of the Public Health Service Act, this includes:

- Health Education Assistance Loans (HEAL)
- Health Professions Student Loans (HPSL)
- Loans for Disadvantaged Students (LDS)
- Primary Care Loans (PCL)
- Nursing Student Loans

In order to get forbearance on a student loan, the member must contact their loan holder requesting "forbearance" of their loan payments because they are participating in an AmeriCorps program. Appendix L is a copy of a "Loan Forbearance letter" published by the Corporation. The member may need to take a copy of this letter to his/her loan holder. The loan holder/servicing center will give her/him a form for requesting a forbearance or deferral. (Lending institutions have standard forms they use for borrowers who request forbearance on loans). While the forms differ from lender to lender, there will be a section that the AmeriCorps member will need to complete. Then, they should send the form to the National Service Trust for verification of service. Writing "forbearance" on the envelope will help direct the request to the proper person. The Trust will complete the appropriate section (if applicable), enclose the "Dear Lender" letter in the appendix, and return the form to the loan holder/servicing center or, if requested by the AmeriCorps member, to him/her.

The Trust will only be able to certify eligibility if there is a completed and signed Trust Fund Enrollment Form on file. Therefore, it is important that these forms are filled out and returned as soon as possible after the project begins. Return these forms to your national agency headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Additional Questions and Answers

What can I use my education award for? Awards can be used to repay existing or future qualified educational loans or to pay for the cost of attending a qualified college or graduate school or an approved school/work program, as defined by the Departments of Education and Labor.

What expenses are considered part of the "cost of attending" a qualified school? The Department of Education has defined the term "costs of attendance" to mean tuition, normal fees and required material, equipment, and supplies. In addition, each educational institution establishes allowances for room and board, books, supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous personal expenses, which are also included in the cost of attendance.

What if I don't use my entire education award all at once? You can use up your education award at any rate you choose, as long as you use it within seven years for qualified expenses at qualified schools.

Can an education award be used at more than one school? Yes. The award can be used to help pay one or more loans or the costs of attendance at one or more educational institutions or a combination.

Can an education award be used to study outside the U.S.? Many post-secondary institutions offer educational opportunities abroad. As long as the institution itself is in the U.S. and meets the legal requirements as defined in section 481(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 1088(a)), you may use the education award to study overseas. Foreign schools, however, do not meet the Higher Education Act criteria.

Can I use my past community service to qualify for an award? No. Only service in an approved AmeriCorps program will be credited for purposes of earning an education award.

What happens if I withdraw from the school or fail to complete my period of enrollment for which the award has been used? The school must have a fair and equitable refund policy that complies with the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. If there is any refund owed and returned to the Corporation, the amount will be credited to your "account" in the Trust, and can be used by you, within seven years of your completion of service.



Will I have to pay taxes on my education award? According to the IRS, in most cases awards are subject to income taxes in the calendar year in which they are used. The Corporation will deduct no taxes, but it will send you a Form 1099 to be used in preparing your income tax form.

Is my award transferable? For example, if I am unable to use it, can I transfer the award to another individual? No. Only AmeriCorps Members are eligible for education awards. You may not transfer it to a relative or any other individual under any circumstances.

Forms

Appendix M describes the forms from the Corporation and gives detailed information on how to fill them out. It is important to remember that every form should be sent to your agency headquarters as soon as possible after your members have enrolled. Also, be sure to retain a copy of every form sent to your agency headquarters for your files.

Appointment

Upon entrance to the program, the following must be completed by the member:

1. state and Federal income tax forms;
2. health insurance form if a member is eligible;
3. direct deposit forms;
4. National Service Trust Form (Appendix N);
5. Member Enrollment Form (Appendix O) - members must sign and date this form. In the first section, For local Program Staff Use, this information will be provided to you by your agency's project director. Complete the requested program information and the member's date of enrollment. Note that the sub grantee ID number is your grant number. You must indicate the recruitment type on each form. Mail this form and the National Trust Form to agency National Headquarters;

NOTE: There is a misleading question on the member enrollment form. Question #4, "Are you a(n) ..." has as a possible response "alien with a work permit/authorization to work." This has led some to believe that aliens with a work permit/authorization to work are eligible to be AmeriCorps Members. They are NOT eligible. Anyone checking this block is INELIGIBLE to be in Americorps.

6. Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification; and
7. SF-1152, Designation of Benefit for Unpaid Compensation.

The supervisor is to complete:

1. Form SF-52, Request for Personnel Action;
2. Position Description (example at Appendix P)
3. Supplemental 52; and
4. AD 322.

Forward completed forms to the personnel office where they will electronically enter the information in the NFC personnel and payroll master file.

For each member, NFC will produce these output documents:

- Form SF-50, Personnel Action;
- Form AD-334, Statement of Earnings and Leave; and
- Form W-2, Earnings Statement.

The supervisor and the member should:

1. review the Member Agreement (Appendix Q) and member must sign;
2. review the safety release form and member must sign (Appendix V);
3. review any performance standards and performance appraisal (example at appendix R).
4. if appropriate, provide member with the child care packet and review with the member. Supervisor must determine if the member is eligible, complete the eligibility form, and both member and supervisor must sign; and
5. present member with USDA/AmeriCorps ID card.



Member Agreements

Members shall sign an agreement which explains agency expectations and member's rights and responsibilities, including:

- beginning and ending dates of the member's term of service;
- minimum number of hours needed to obtain a post-service education benefit;
- identification of member's supervisor;
- project assignment and service activities;
- activity performance standards;
- living allowance amount and payment method;
- a description of the other member entitled benefits;
- a description of any deductions for room and board;
- acceptable conduct;
- prohibited activities;
- requirements under the Drug Free Workplace Act;
- termination and suspension rules (including the specific circumstances under which a member can be released for cause);
- grievance procedures; and
- other items as appropriate.



The Department will develop two different Member Agreements for use in the USDA/AmeriCorps program;

1. Member Agreement for members of the Anti-hunger and the Public Lands and Environment Team.
2. Member Agreement for members of the Rural Development Team.

In addition, if a member has not completed high school, they must agree in writing to obtain a high school diploma or GED certificate before using the education benefit.

USDA will maintain the confidentiality of information according to the Privacy Act. Prior written consent by members must be obtained before using their names, photographs, and other identifying information for publicity or promotional purposes. If members are under 18 years of age, parental or legal guardian written consent must be obtained. The easiest way to handle this is to include a standard informed consent form as a part of the Member Agreement signed at enrollment (this information has been incorporated into the member acknowledgment form found at Appendix V). You may release aggregate and other non-identifying information about members, and you must release member information to your granting agency, the Corporation, and authorized program evaluators. NFC security for members will be the same as that of regular USDA employees.



Time and Attendance

NFC will process payroll for the USDA/AmeriCorps Members.

Full-time members will be granted 8 hours of excused absence each month for the first five months of their Term of Service for a total of 40 hours of excused absence. Advanced personal days can be granted at the discretion of the supervisor. Nine Federal holidays will also be granted to full-time members (limited to eight hours per holiday).

The following PC TARE and other T&A entry system entries will be required:

- initial entry (in master record);
- special accounting codes (defined by each agency);
- time and attendance submission to NFC each pay period; and
- termination entry.

The following transactions will be used:

- 01 - hours worked (80 hours maximum per pay period);
- 21 - hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a week (these hours will be paid at the base rate, not the overtime rate-NFC will convert); members are not eligible for overtime pay. They must be listed as EXEMPT from FLSA.
- 66 - Federal holidays and excused absence (manually track hours of excused absence to ensure the hours do not exceed 40);
- 67 - hours of paid absence due to an injury suffered on the job, beginning the day after the day of injury. Forty-five calendar days is the maximum number of days allowed. Non-work days count toward the 45-day limit if evidence of inability to perform regular duties exist on those non-work days; and
- 71 - LWOP (this is to be used for absences for military duty and any non-pay status - explain in the remarks section of the T&A).

T&A's must always account for 80 hours. If less than 80 hours were worked during a pay period, use entry 71 - LWOP for hours not worked.



Military Leave

Members who are also members in military reserve units will be allowed to complete their two weeks of required military reserve duty. They will not receive any compensation for this period of time and will not be credited time towards the 1700 hour community service requirement. They will be carried as LWOP on the Time and Attendance Report. They will have to make up this loss of time in order to complete the 1700 hours. In the event they cannot make up this time, they may, at the discretion of the Department, be granted an early release for "compelling personal reasons" and be awarded a pro-rated share of the education award. This exemption to allow a "leave of absence" does NOT apply to training or duty beyond the annually required two weeks. Leaving an AmeriCorps Program to perform such additional duty or receive additional training may result in the member losing their education award.

Jury Duty

Jury duty is part of a member's "civic duty". As such, time spent on jury duty (or just going to find out if you will be called) does count as hours of service performed toward meeting the 1700 hour minimum. In addition, the member should be paid their normal daily salary minus any amount they receive from the jurisdiction in which they are performing or answering a call for jury duty.



Personal Emergencies

Members should use excused absence hours for personal emergencies. Supervisors can approve LWOP for extended absences. Upon return, the AmeriCorps Member and the supervisor are to develop any necessary make-up schedules.

Work Schedules

Local agency supervisors are responsible for developing work schedules. USDA recommends a 40-hour work week (including training). Local supervisors have the authority to adjust schedules to meet project needs and/or to assist members make up lost time. Supervisors are cautioned about scheduling time to insure that a member serves a minimum of nine months, does not exceed a maximum of 1,812 hours, and does not exceed a maximum of twelve months. In some instances this may be difficult but there is no flexibility in these three requirements. Supervisors will also have to keep a careful record of hours of excused absence used by each member.

ID Cards

AmeriCorps Members will be issued Form AD 1096 (USDA) (8/94), the USDA/AmeriCorps identification card. Forms will be sent to each agency for issuance to members.



Attire/Uniforms

It is expected that all AmeriCorps Members will be proud of their service and will reflect that pride by wearing the AmeriCorps uniform. Upon entering AmeriCorps, members will receive a T-shirt, sweatshirt, hat, and pin. This complete uniform must be worn at official AmeriCorps events. In addition, the Department's policy is that, at minimum, Rural Development Team Members will wear the pin at all times and Anti-Hunger Teams and Public Lands and Environment Team Members will wear either a T-shirt, sweatshirt, hat, or a pin while on duty. However, USDA realizes that work projects and work conditions will vary considerably around the country. While members must wear the other items whenever appropriate, the local project manager may decide to vary the attire based on weather, safety, and work conditions.

The Department intends to purchase a minimum set of uniforms for the FY 1996 USDA AmeriCorps Program. Agencies that wish to purchase additional items should remind their procurement offices that CFR 48 Federal Acquisition Regulation, Chapter one, Subpart 8.6, designates the Department of Justice's UNICOR, Federal Prison Industries, Inc. as a mandatory source for uniforms. There is no bid or competitive process required to use UNICOR. The point of contact is Ms. Wanda Moody, UNICOR at the Federal Correctional Institution, Jesup, GA 31545. Whatever uniforms or patches are procured they should clearly identify the members as belonging to a USDA AmeriCorps Program. The Department will provide the logo and all agencies are reminded to follow the Corporation's rules governing the use of the AmeriCorps logo:

Drivers License

AmeriCorps Members who possess a valid State driver's license may, if required, drive a government vehicle. The exception to this is members less than 18 years of age may **not** operate a Government vehicle.

Members over 18 years of age and have the proper state driver's license are covered under the Tort Claims Act and are authorized to drive a government vehicle or their own vehicle in the performance of their duties.

Travel Expenses

Temporary duty travel expenses may be authorized (type C only) and reimbursed according to Federal Travel Regulations. Reimbursement will be paid by the host agency. No relocation expenses will be authorized or paid.

Transfers

A transfer is defined as an AmeriCorps Member who retains the service hours s/he has earned and applies them toward the completion of her/his education award by either: 1) moving to a different geographic site within the same AmeriCorps*USA program or: 2) moving to a completely different AmeriCorps*USA program. In both cases, all parties involved are fully cognizant of the transfer situation and schedule before it occurs. While the transfer may occur to meet compelling personal circumstances, the transfer should also meet programmatic needs. Please keep in mind that a member technically has no right of transfer within a program as an individual. Thus, a transfer should not occur solely because a member would like a change of geographic environment.

1) Within the same AmeriCorps*USA program.

While the transfer may occur to meet compelling personal circumstances, the transfer should also be based upon legitimate programmatic reasons such as community need, service activities, or organizational capacity. For example, a National Direct program with subgrantee sites in Nashville and Indianapolis may find that in Nashville there is a greater need than in Indianapolis for more members than expected. Thus, based upon community need and the capacity of the Nashville site, members can be transferred. In all cases, the members cannot be forced to transfer.



In all cases of a transfer within a program, the appropriate funds and education award allocation may be transferred to the new host site in order to cover the related participant support costs. Generally, the education award allocation and funds for the members' living allowance are administered by the relevant host site.

When such a transfer occurs, the original Site Director must complete a Change of Status/Term Form and send the original to their agency headquarters and a copy to the new site placement Director and the member. It is not necessary to complete another Trust Enrollment Form.

2) Between Different AmeriCorps*USA Programs.

The transfer of a member and her/his relevant service hours from one AmeriCorps program to another must be done within certain parameters. Foremost, the "Transfer Member" must be leaving Program A for a compelling personal reason as determined by Program A. The "Transfer Member" must apply to and be accepted by Program B. In order to offer enrollment to the "Transfer Member", Program B must have an available slot in the incoming member class.

In such a transfer situation, no funds are transferred from Program A to Program B. Rather, the appropriate funds are either used by Program A to fill the vacant slot or returned to the Corporation. In all cases the Program A Site director must complete a Change of Status/Term Form and send the original to the CNCS and a copy to the Program B Site Director and the member. It is not necessary to complete another Trust Enrollment Form.



Terms of Service

USDA will operate the AmeriCorps Program primarily as a full-time member program. However, part-time members are authorized upon approval from the Department. Full-time members must serve a minimum of 1700 actual working hours which provides direct community service (excluding excused absences and Federal holidays) during a period of not less than nine months and not more than one year. A member may spend up to 20 percent of his/her time on training.

Unless there is a compelling reason, members who fail to complete the minimum amount of hours will forfeit the educational grant.

The Term of Service for USDA/AmeriCorps full-time members will be scheduled for 1,812 hours. The difference between 1,812 and 1,700 hours will allow payment for excused absences (40 hours) and Federal holiday (72 hours).



Part-Time Members

A project may elect to have part-time AmeriCorps Members. However, they must get approval from their Agencies and it must be an integral part of their program. Agencies must contact the Department, who will in turn seek approval from the CNCS.

Members may be part-time under the following conditions:

- An individual performing part-time national service in an approved national service position shall agree to participate in the program sponsoring the position for not less than 900 hour during a period of -
 - 1 - not more than 2 years; or
 - 2.- not more than 3 years if the individual is enrolled in an institute of higher education while performing all or a portion of the service.

The Term of Service for part-time members would only be 952 hours. This is 900 hours of service plus four holidays (32 hours) and two and a half days (20 hours) of personal leave. Part-time members are not eligible for AmeriCorps health care or child care benefits. They will receive all the other benefits that full-time members are entitled to receive. They must also receive the same degree of training that full-time members receive.



Instructions for Payment of Part-Time Members

1. Using a Nature of Action code of 515 (conversion) enter a grade of 00 and a step of 00 for the member.
2. Give the hourly pay rate.
3. If this is a person being converted from full-time to part-time, do a SF 52, use the 999 block to explain what you are doing and change from Grade 00 step 01 or 02 to step 00 and list the new hourly pay rate.

Note: Hourly rate for part-time members must be computed by multiplying the annual living allowance for full-time members by 52.94% to get the part-time living allowance, then dividing the part-time living allowance by 952 hours.

For FY 96 - $\$7,945 \times 52.94\% = \$4,206/952 = \$4.41$ per hour.



Non-Completion of Service Hours

There are at least two different non-completion situations.

1) Program non-completion

If a full-time AmeriCorps Member is enrolled in a program and is released for cause or leaves the program for a personal reason that is not compelling as determined by the program, the member cannot receive any portion of her/his education award

Completion of the required number of service hours is not the only criteria that must be met before a member is eligible for an education award. The member must also satisfactorily complete assignments, tasks, or projects and meet any other performance criteria that has been clearly communicated at the beginning of the term of service and are contained in the Member Agreement form. Thus, if a member has completed 1700 service hours but, for non-compelling reasons, does not complete the service program, this member is not eligible to receive any portion of the allotted education award.

In both situations, the Program Director must fill out both a Change of Status/Term form and an End of Term of Service Form indicating Early Terminated for Cause. The member must fill out an Exit Form. Again, remember to make a copy for your records and forward the original to agency headquarters. If the member signed the form, provide them a copy.



2) Service hours non-completion

At the end of a program, if a full-time AmeriCorps Member falls short of completing the required 1700 service hours for a compelling personal reason but has completed at least 255 hours, s/he is eligible to receive a pro-rated education award. For example, an AmeriCorps Program became operational in September 1994. An AmeriCorps Member joined the program in its January 1995 class, fully intending to participate in a 12 month program. However, the program's funding is not renewed and the program is forced to close its doors in September 1995. The member has completed only 1400 service hours and is unable to fulfill the remaining 300 service hours. In such a case the AmeriCorps Member would be able to receive 1400/1700th of their education award because the termination of the program was beyond the member's control and is considered by the program to be a compelling personal reason. The Program Director must fill out both a Change of Status/Term form and an End of Term of Service Form indicating: "Compelling Personal Circumstances." The member must fill out an Exit Form.

However, if the program is refunded, the member should be allowed to finish the remaining three months of the program and complete the remaining 300 service hours.

If however, a member completes the program but fails to earn 1700 hours by the end of the program because s/he had too many unexplained absences, then if the program certified successful completion, the member may get a part-time education award for at least 900 hours of service.



Multiple Terms of Service

A term of service may be a full year program or a summer program. Individuals may participate in more than one term of service. However, the maximum number of educational grants an individual may receive is limited to two.

To be eligible for another term of service, an individual must receive a satisfactory performance review(s) for any previous term(s) of service. Mere eligibility for an additional term of service does not guarantee selection or placement. Members should also be aware that budget constraints may lead to situations where the living allowance they receive in the second term of service is lower than the first term of service.

Supervisors must make recommendations for continued or additional service. Members' eligibility for second or additional terms of service must be based on at least a mid-term and end-of-term evaluation of members' performance that focused on factors such as:

- whether the member has completed the required number of hours;
- whether the member has satisfactorily completed assignments, tasks, and/or projects; and
- whether the member has met any other performance criteria that were clearly communicated both orally and in writing at the beginning of the term of service.



Filling Vacancies

The CNCS desires to create cohesive "classes" of members who start programs in September, January, or June and who complete the program as a class from nine to twelve months later. This however is the ideal and not always the reality. The inability to fill vacancies during the course of the year can have a negative impact on projects. Therefore, vacancies may be filled at any time during the year. However, when possible the CNCS would like to stay with the class concept. Programs are encouraged to fill empty slots at the start of the next term of service. This will ensure the same comprehensive training and orientation to replacement Members as was provided to members of the first class.

Provided their job performance is deemed satisfactory, AmeriCorps Members who enroll at the start of a second or third class would continue with the program in the following program year in order to accrue the 1700 hours of necessary service for a full-time education award. With the approval of the Corporation, a program may also convert the full-time slot to a part-time slot and ensure that the replacement AmeriCorps Member serves at least 900 hours. Should the program not be renewed, the CNCS would try to place the Member in another AmeriCorps program; failing that, the affected member would be eligible for a pro-rated education award if they have completed at least 15% of the necessary hours. AmeriCorps Members enroll with the expectation that they will complete their term of service; they may not be offered a pro-rated education award at the time they begin their term of service.



End of Term of Service

When a member leaves National Service, two forms must be completed for the Corporation:

National Service Trust End of Term of Service Form
(Appendix S)

AmeriCorps Member Exit Form (Appendix T)

These forms should be mailed immediately to your agency national headquarters. You should retain a copy for your records and you should give the member a copy of at least the National Service Trust End of Term of Service Form.

Also, an SF 52 for resignation should be submitted to personnel. Member must sign the back of the SF 52. It is not necessary to give a reason for the resignation.

If a member is entitled to an educational award, the CNCS will send a letter to the member informing them of the amount of the award. This letter may be presented to a loan holder or a school. The loan holder or the school will contact the CNCS for payment. Payments will be made directly to them, not to the member. When payments are made, the CNCS will notify the member of the amounts and the balance in the account. Letters should be received within 20 days of completing a term of service. The letter will automatically be sent to the permanent address furnished by the member, so it is important that the members keep the National Trust Fund informed of any address changes.



Instructions for Continuation of AmeriCorps Members Past the 1812 Hour Limit

1. AmeriCorps Members must work a minimum of 1700 hours to earn the full post service award. The only maximum is that their service period cannot exceed 12 months.

2. It is possible that a program has money to continue paying an AmeriCorps Member beyond the standard 1812 hour limit of the USDA AmeriCorps programs. If an agency wants to continue a program and the work is AmeriCorps work, the members may be retained beyond the 1812 limit provided they receive the same pay and benefits that they received during the 1812 hours.

3. To be able to pay them using NFC, the current "Not to Exceed" date given for the member must be changed so that they can be paid beyond that date.

4. If the member is to be doing work that is not AmeriCorps related, you must be aware of two conditions:
 - a. The member can't be paid less than minimum wage and is now subject to the same rules and provisions as others who would be doing the same work under whatever program the agency chooses to pay them.
 - b. The member may be prohibited from re-entering the AmeriCorps program next year, because they will be considered a recent Federal Employee. We cannot enroll into the AmeriCorps Program personnel who have been Federal Employees in the last six months prior to entering AmeriCorps.

5. If a member works beyond the 1812 hours, they do not get any additional post service education award.

Authorization to sign End of Term of Service Forms

Supervisors, project managers, or project directors may sign this form. The names of personnel who will be signing these forms must be submitted to your agency national headquarters. Keep in mind that the person signing this form is certifying the number of hours served and whether the member is being released for cause or for compelling personal circumstances. Agencies should have accurate lists of certifying officials. Educational awards can only be made to individuals who have a form on file signed by an individual on records as authorized to sign.

Member Release

Members may be released for:

1. for compelling personal circumstances; or
2. for cause, as defined by the Corporation and by the program's member agreement.

Written documentation is required whenever a member is released. Supervisors have the primary responsibility for determining when to release a member. Members released due to compelling circumstances may receive a pro-rated educational award while members released for cause shall not.



Compelling Circumstances

The project manager/supervisor is in the best position to determine whether a member's personal circumstances are sufficiently compelling to justify release on this basis. If the project manager determines that there is justification for release, Agency National Headquarters must be notified. The Agency, in consultation with the Department, has the approving authority for release. If release is approved for compelling personal circumstances, we may elect either to authorize a pro-rated education award or to temporarily suspend service for up to two years. In order to be eligible for a pro-rated education award, a member must have served a minimum of 15 percent of his or her term of service. If the member is released on the grounds that an accommodation of a disability would impose an undue burden, we must document our determination and notify the CNCS. Such circumstances are to be considered "compelling" for purposes of this clause.

Some examples of reasons which could justify the early release of a member and entitle the person to a portion of an award:

- Sickness or critical illness of the member
- Death or critical illness of a member of the member's immediate family (spouse, parent, sibling, child, or guardian).
- Termination of a project site if reassignment to another project is not possible.



Release for Cause

Members may be released for cause according to the conditions of the Corporation and the members contract.

Members shall be released for cause if they are convicted of a felony. If members are charged with a violent felony or the sale or distribution of a controlled substance, they must be suspended from service without a living allowance and without receiving credit for hours missed. Additional provisions for releasing members for cause shall be added to the member agreement.

Any member that drops out of a program without obtaining a release for compelling personal circumstances is considered to be released for cause. A member released for cause may not receive any portion of an education award. A member wrongly released or suspended for cause will receive credit for any service missed and reimbursement for missed living allowances as specified in 45 CFR, 25232.230

All adverse action cases shall be thoroughly documented. The supervisor must write a complete, detailed statement of the incident(s). Include documentation of interviews with the member and written statements from individuals involved in the situation. Also state when the member was informed and understood the level of performance and/or conduct expected, and to whom (if any) the member was referred for assistance.

Records of proposals for release must be sent immediately to the Regional or State office. The release process shall be completed no earlier than 15 days from receipt of the proposed action unless the member's presence constitutes an emergency or a threat to other individuals. The member must be provided with a written notice stating the grounds for release and appeal procedures, including time limitations for filing an appeal; and the member must be provided ample opportunity to respond either orally or in writing to the charges.

The following are examples which would **NOT** justify the member receiving an award:

- Terminating to go back to school.
- Terminating to get a job.
- Terminating because member does not enjoy the work.
- Terminating because of the size of living allowance.
- Terminating to move.

Both the CNCS and the Department feel strongly about enforcing this regulation for termination. If a Project Director has any questions regarding Termination for Compelling Personal Circumstances, consult with your Agency contact in Washington, D.C.

Notice to Corporation and National Service Trust

The Department must notify the Corporation and National Service Trust immediately whenever it suspends or terminates a member, whether for compelling circumstances or for cause.

Reinstatement Rights

AmeriCorps members who, through no fault of their own, lose substantial service time, with the approval of their supervisor, may be allowed to return to projects if they can reasonably and safely complete their term of service.



Resumption of Service

Any member whose service was suspended because of being charged with a violent felony or sale or distribution of a controlled substance may resume service if he or she is found not guilty or if such a charge is dismissed. Any member whose service was suspended because of being convicted of a first offense of possession of a controlled substance may resume service by demonstrating that he or she has enrolled in an approved drug rehabilitation program. A member convicted of a second or third offense of possession of a controlled substance may resume service by demonstrating successful completion of a rehabilitation program. In addition, any individual released for cause who wishes to reapply to the program from which he or she was released or to any other AmeriCorps program is required to disclose the release to that program. Failure to disclose to an AmeriCorps program any history of having been released for cause from another AmeriCorps program will render an individual ineligible to receive the AmeriCorps educational award, whether or not that individual successfully completes the term of service.

Returning Members

A returning member is defined as a member who leaves a program for a compelling personal reason but intends on completing the term of service in the future with the same or a different AmeriCorps*USA Program. Upon leaving Program X, the director must complete the Change of Status/Term Form and indicate that the member is "Suspended with intent to transfer." The Director then sends the completed form to their agency headquarters. The member must keep a copy of the Change of Status/Term Form and the National Service Trust will hold the service hours in a pending status.



When the member applies and is accepted into Program Y within the two-year period of suspension, s/he presents the Program Y Director with the copy of the Change of Status/Term Form in order to reinstate the member and allow service hours to transfer. It is not necessary for the Program Y Director to complete another Trust Enrollment Form.

If the member does not join another program within the two year period, s/he will automatically become eligible for a pro-rated education award two years from the transfer date provided that s/he had completed at least 15% of the necessary hours. If the member will not be able to return, s/he should notify the CNCS or the Director of her/his original program sometime within the two-year period.

Discipline Policy

USDA has assumed a sponsorship role for AmeriCorps Members. Part of the responsibility that goes with this sponsorship role is to provide mentoring and assistance to our members. Supervisors are encouraged to reach out to members who are having problems. Many of our AmeriCorps Members will be young people with few problem solving skills. It is our job to provide new skills that will reduce their problems to manageable levels. Many times problems that manifest at the work place can be resolved when someone takes an interest and offers to help. Often just listening can help. Supervisors are encouraged to go the extra mile with members before resorting to any type of formal discipline. However, when all efforts fail to resolve problems which affect the work place, supervisors should follow the discipline path outlined following this paragraph.



Steps to Follow for Discipline of AmeriCorps Members

Members shall be informed in writing of alleged improper conduct or work deficiencies within seven days of occurrence of the incident. Four types of adverse actions may be used to correct performance or conduct problems.

1. **Verbal Reprimand** - use the verbal reprimand to correct minor infractions. This is an informal method with explicit dialogue between the member and the supervisor. The supervisor must ensure that the member knows the level of performance or conduct expected, and that the member understands the nature of the specific deficiency in his/her conduct or performance. The supervisor shall document the specific dialogue of verbal reprimands.
2. **Written reprimand** - action taken to correct a single serious offense or a long series of lesser offenses. It will be used as a means of informing a member of unacceptable performance or behavior. This will inform the member that failure to show improvement within a reasonable period of time may be cause for release.
3. **Suspension** - members may be suspended for one or more days for serious infractions. Written documentation is required. The member will have to make up any lost time.
4. **Release** - supervisors may release, for cause, any member whose conduct and/or performance is unsatisfactory. This action will be taken if a member persistently refuses to accept corrective action and/or to conform to reasonable standards of performance or conduct.

Appeal Procedures

Within 15 days of receipt of the decision to release, the member may appeal the adverse action taken by the supervisor, to the following appropriate levels:

1. Project Director or appropriate line officer;
2. State or Regional line officer, if not resolved at the Project Director level; and
3. Agency Head, Washington office, if not resolved at the State or Regional level.

Refer the member to a 74 counselor and/or to the nearest personnel office for assistance in filing an appeal.

A member who is wrongly released or suspended for cause will receive credit for any service missed and back-pay for missed living allowances. The legislation further describes the conditions under which members whose service has been suspended may be reinstated, the impact of release for cause, and the grievance procedure available to members. (See 45 CFR, Chapter XXV, Section 2522.230)



Grievance Procedures

Americorps Members have the right to file grievances.

The deadline for filing a grievance, except for a grievance that alleges fraud or criminal activity, is one year after the date of the alleged occurrence of the event that is the subject of the grievance.

The deadline for the hearing and decision are as follows:

- **Hearing** - a hearing on any grievance shall be conducted not later than 30 days after the filing of the grievance.
- **Decision** - a decision on any such grievance shall be made not later than 60 days after the filing of such grievance.

Arbitration:

- In general -

Jointly selected arbitrator - in the event of a decision on a grievance that is adverse to the party who filed such grievance, or 60 days after the filing of such grievance if no decision has been reached, such party shall be permitted to submit such grievance to binding arbitration before a qualified arbitrator who is jointly selected and independent of the interested parties.

Appointed arbitrator - if the parties cannot agree on an arbitrator, the Chief Executive Officer shall appoint an arbitrator from a list of qualified arbitrators within 15 days after receiving a request for such appointment from one of the parties to the grievance.

- **Deadline for proceeding** - an arbitration proceeding shall be held not later than 45 days after the request for such arbitration proceeding or, if the arbitrator is appointed by the Chief Executive, not later than 30 days after the appointment of such arbitrator.
- **Deadline for decision** - a decision concerning a grievance shall be made not later than 30 days after the date such arbitration proceeding begins.
- **Cost** - in general the cost of an arbitration proceeding shall be divided evenly between the parties to the arbitration. An exception to this is if as part of the decision, costs are placed on one party.





Chapter Nine

Training and Development

General

Training and education is a vital element of the National Service Program. It will be an on-going process during the entire program. Approximately 20 percent of a member's time should be spent in some type of training or educational activity. It does not have to be typical classroom training but should include significant "experiential education." You can be creative in devising methods, instructors, and sites for this training.

Projects will have to track service hours and will have to certify that not more than 20 percent of the 1700 hours were spent on training and education. The CNCS will monitor and periodically audit programs to ensure that activities are categorized correctly and that the hours are in fact served.

Training and Education versus Direct Service

A common question that has been asked is, "What should be considered training and education versus what should be considered direct service?" The following paragraphs will attempt to answer this question.

1. The CNCS does not differentiate between education and training; they both count toward the 20 percent limit. Therefore, the most direct way of keeping track of education and training hours is by backing into it; any eligible activity that is not direct service must be education or training.
2. Certain types of training and education are easily categorized as such for the Corporation's purposes. If members spend a half-day each week away from the service site, learning computer skills that relate indirectly to their service experience, but which may help them in the future, that is clearly education. If a corps that will be working in public safety goes on a week-long retreat on alternative conflict resolution and mediation, that is clearly training.
3. Other activities are not quite so straight forward. Consider, for example, a program that takes its members on a mountain retreat for four days. The first three days are spent in the classroom and in the field learning environmental techniques, and on the fourth day the members perform a project cleaning up a portion of a polluted river. In this case, the first three days would count as training and education, whereas the last day would count as direct service.

4. Training and education activities should be counted as such if they are planned and structured. To the extent that learning opportunities occur incidentally to direct service, or that training occurs "on the job," those activities should not count toward the 20 percent limit.

Member Orientation/Training

Members should be provided with an orientation briefing and guidelines at the beginning of the project. This should include (but is not limited to) the following:

1. Welcome and introduction of appropriate personnel.
2. A reinforcement of the "ethic of service." Use this opportunity to discuss the meaning of citizenship and to encourage eligible members to register to vote.
3. An overview of the project(s), introduction to the community and natural resources, cross-cultural sensitivity, and other project specific training.
4. Give specific information about your program rules. You must cover member rights and responsibilities, including the program's code of conduct and safety protocol, prohibited activities, requirements under the Drug Free Workplace Act, sexual harassment, and other nondiscrimination issues, suspension and release from service, and grievance procedures. This is also the time to provide information about AmeriCorps benefits, payroll information, time and attendance, travel, expense reimbursement and similar operation policies.
5. Other training that should be considered in this phase is safety training, CPR, First Aid, conflict resolution, etc.



You are required to provide members with the training, skills, and knowledge they need to perform well in their assigned service project. For members who have not completed high school, you must provide support services to help them get a high school diploma or GED certificate. Local area schools will be able to assist you with this program. You may also want to provide college readiness programs for members going on to higher education. Both high school/GED programs and college readiness programs can be effectively integrated with service learning curricula. You should use service experiences to help members improve their skills, internalize project goals, and increase their insight.

A training plan shall be developed for each member based on their individual training needs. This would include their GED or college readiness training. Also, training directly related to the job they will be expected to perform on the project. For example, if the person is working on recycling wood waste at landfills, that person should attend workshops or training in this subject or be trained by an agency specialist on this subject.

Tailgate sessions are ideal to review information, such as:

- orientation to the project site and its relationship to local residents and AmeriCorps objectives;

- work progress;

- job hazard analysis;

- on-the-job (OJT) training;

- benefits of the service/work to individual member and to the public; and

- discussion, questions and answers.

Project supervision should lead the members into an understanding of how the project benefits can contribute to their present and future success. On-the-job training should be emphasized as a means of developing member knowledge and skills which should enhance present performance and future employability.

Informal work-learning relationships between the members and project staff should be encouraged.

Project Manager Training

Project manager training will be held prior to start date after approval notification. States/Regions will be notified of time and location for this training. Special training on personnel management, administration, safety, special needs awareness, conflict resolution, team building, etc. will be included.



OJT Checklist

Project work managers should stress to members the importance of the following:

- Be punctual - report to work on time.
- Be presentable - report to the job with proper work attire.
- Be safe - keep yourself and others safe on the job.
- Be organized - keep your work tools or equipment in good order.
- Be attentive - listen to directions carefully, and do not be afraid to ask questions if something does not seem clear.
- Be patient - understand the supervisor's need to be concerned with all members, not just one.
- Be a team player - work with others to accomplish a job objective.
- Use initiative - when you see a job that needs doing, do it without having to wait for direction from your supervisor.
- Be thorough - doing your share of the job even though others may not be doing theirs. Learn to work as an individual and a team member.
- Be helpful - promote comradeship within the group, such as helping others do their job when they feel bad, do not know how to do the job, or when they need help.
- Keep the supervisor informed of potential problem areas which could affect getting the job done properly at some point.
- See a project through to an identified completion point.
- Set an achievable individual work standard (pace as well as quality criteria) agreeable to you and your supervisor mutually.
- Find out from a supervisor what can be done to improve work performance and then do it.
- Be proud of the work accomplished.



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

Since both the Anti-Hunger Team and the Public Lands and Environment Team will be corps with similar mixes of members, they will both have the same three member development objectives, which are:

1. To enable members to develop motivation, educational skills, vocational goals, and financial resources so that, out of the members who started the program with no desire to continue their education, at least 50 percent will change their mind and decide to further their education. This change will be determined by member interviews before the start of the service year and at the end of the service year.
2. To spur 65 percent of the members who entered the program without a high school degree to earn GED's within a year.
3. To educate members about hunger, nutrition, and poverty issues - or about public lands and the environment issues - so that at least 25 percent of the members express a desire at the end of the service year to enter careers in the field in which they provided service, and at least 50 percent express their desire to volunteer for service in that field in the future. This will be determined by member interviews at the end of the service year.



Member Development - Rural Development Team

The following are the top three member development objectives of the Rural Development Team, which will be measured through member interviews conducted before the start of and after the completion of the first year of service.

1. To increase by 20 percent the number of members expressing a desire to obtain a job in rural development or rural environmental protection in the region in which they served or a region with similar characteristics.
2. To increase by 25 percent the number of members who plan to obtain further graduate school or professional school training in their discipline of service.
3. To obtain a written commitment from 65 percent of the members who graduate from the program to volunteer to mentor members in the following year's program or to engage in another specific volunteer activity related to rural development or environmental protection.

On-Going Training

Each state will need to determine what type of training will be most appropriate for their members during the year. For those members that do not have a high school diploma, they will need GED training. Teams may need team building and problem solving training. Career Counseling should be available for members. Mentoring should be considered for each person. There is a wide range of training that can be provided to members. States or regions should be creative and try to meet their needs and the needs of the members.



Member Journals

Members should be encouraged to keep a journal of their year of national service. Journal writing gives a person the opportunity to record events to be perused at a later time; it provides a time for reflection, and a chance to analyze feelings and emotions brought about by events of the day. Sharing journal entries with other members in the team helps create understanding and cements a team into a cohesive unit. Project managers should ensure that members have the time and opportunity to share their entries. There will also be times when members may be willing to share their entries to a larger audience. These entries can be a powerful tool to enlighten the public about our program. The benefits to journal writing are numerous, and members should be urged to take time to do this type of writing.



"AmeriCorps Spirit"

As you know, one of your most important tasks in helping run AmeriCorps is to build a special spirit for AmeriCorps that:

- Imbues all our AmeriCorps members with a special ethic of service and citizenship.
- Creates a unique public identity for the program that is different from either a jobs program or a volunteer program.
- Assures that members understand that they are all part of a larger program with other projects both within and outside of USDA.
- Guarantees that all members understand not only the responsibilities, duties, and requirements which they must meet, but also the rights and benefits to which they are legally entitled.
- Provides members with enough understanding of the program that they can effectively communicate that understanding to the media, policy makers, and the general public.
- Fosters an "Esprit de corps" that motivates all our Members to give a 100% effort every day.
- Ensures that all members work on a regular basis side-by-side with other members of different education levels, races, genders, economic backgrounds, etc.
- Allows the members to have structured time for critical reflection and discussion to enable them to put their service activities in perspective.



Some Things You Can Do To Build the "AmeriCorps Spirit"

1. Set-up meetings in which all Members in each Anti-Hunger Team, Public Lands and Environment Team, and Rural Development cluster physically get together for training, project planning, critical reflection, and joint projects. Each cluster should alternate among the members leadership responsibilities for the meetings or work projects, and in making presentations about their service projects. Another tool for your use is the teleconference. When it is not possible to physically get together, teleconferences can be very helpful.

2. Establish a schedule in which your Members meet with USDA AmeriCorps Members in other projects, clusters, or issue areas. Members in all our projects have a deep desire to meet their peers and learn about our other projects, no matter the sponsoring USDA agency. If these members cannot physically meet, they should talk on telephone conference calls.

3. Arrange for your members to meet with members of other, non-USDA AmeriCorps projects. Remember that USDA's 1200 members comprise only 6% of the 20,000 members in the overall AmeriCorps program. It is likely that there are non-USDA AmeriCorps Members serving in or nearby your project. Our members very much want to learn about such programs. If these members cannot physically meet, they should talk on telephone conference calls.

4. Organize "signature service projects" for members. Members from your project can work alongside members from other USDA AmeriCorps projects, local FFA chapters, local 4-H groups, other local youth groups. Your members can also implement projects on certain weekend days to coordinate community volunteer days in which ordinary local citizens are mobilized for certain large projects -- typically requiring strenuous physical labor -- help the members bond. The idea is to challenge teams to complete tasks that individuals can't. Such projects could be particularly helpful for Rural Development Team Members, many of whom will not often perform physical labor or work alongside each other. Such projects can also generate enormous public support.

Some suggestions:

- Tree planting in urban and rural areas
- Stream or park clean-ups
- Painting or repairing
- Community nutrition/anti-hunger festivals
- Renovating, repairing, or painting low-income houses
- Children immunization events
- Distributing flyers on USDA hunger programs
- Serving holiday meals to homeless citizens
- Making local facilities handicapped accessible
- Renovating or repairing Forest Service visitor centers

While Forest Service Public lands sites may not be able to hold such signature projects off forest land, they certainly can organize community volunteers working on special projects on forest land.

5. Arrange recreational activities for members for their personal time or as part of their 20% of time in training. Recreational activities, either within a project or cluster or with other projects or clusters, is a great way to build team work, without the pressure and anxiety that often accompanies more formal "team building" exercises. Members could hike, visit an amusement park, go rafting, play Frisbee football, hold a scavenger hunt, etc. You should strongly consider opportunities to camp out on a National Forest.

6. Organize training programs and other events on a regional basis. The USDA Rural Development team, in particular, was designed to operate on a regional basis in order to be able to tackle problems that are common throughout each region. All Rural Development Team members in a region should meet together physically at least four times a year. All Rural Development Team Members in a region should also talk to each other on conference calls at least once every other month.

7. Working with other regional facilitators and with my office, organize issue-based conference calls for members. Most of our service projects in one region have a similar counterpart in at least one other region. All members working on rural fire protection throughout the country should talk to each other. Likewise for those working on housing, water quality, economic planning, recycling, tourism development, flood relief, etc. I would also like to speak by conference call periodically with all members in various clusters, states and/or regions.

8. Arrange for outsiders to speak and/or meet with members. Some suggestions: experts on issues, former Peace Corps or Vista volunteers, executive directors from State Commissions on National Service, State staff of the Corporation for National and Community Service, elected officials, staff from other AmeriCorps projects, etc.

9. Set aside a public space at each worksite to display information. Create a bulletin board or kiosk on which to place positive newsclips, thank you letters, photos of service projects, information about other AmeriCorps projects, etc.

10. Create "United Way" type thermometers and place them in either a public place or at your office to track progress of your service projects. Let all the members graphically see evidence of how they are "getting things done."



11. Set-aside time for members to keep a journal of their experiences. Journal writing is a great way to both document our program and allow members to critically reflect on their service.

12. Match all our members up with USDA employees, who are not directly involved in managing AmeriCorps, to serve as one-on-one mentors. This mentoring opportunity should be open to all local USDA employees, not just those from sponsoring agencies.

13. Ensure that all members receive copies of the weekly AmeriCorps/USDA newsletter. This newsletter report will be made available each Friday to members and staff via an USDA computer bulletin board, Internet, and in paper copies.

14. Facilitate a process through which members can help design their own service projects, community service and member development objectives, quarterly reports, and year-end reports. Be careful not to use such member involvement as an excuse for our Department to neglect our legal management and oversight role. However, a strong collaboration between the members and our agencies in every aspect of the program management and development will only enhance the quality of our projects.



Chapter Ten

National Public Affairs Policy

Purpose

The purpose of the National Media Policy is to ensure that a uniform message, consistent with the AmeriCorps/USDA mission and vision statements, is conveyed to the media nationwide about all AmeriCorps/USDA projects. All projects must continually communicate the message that AmeriCorps is working to "get things done" while building community, opportunity, and responsibility. The media policy is a reflection of a Departmental public affairs program to educate the public through the dissemination of accurate and timely information about all AmeriCorps/USDA projects. The strategy targets daily and weekly newspapers, and television and radio stations in the communities near the AmeriCorps/USDA sites.

Guidelines

1) Any press release, fact sheet, brochure, or flyer describing AmeriCorps projects or the service of AmeriCorps Members must include the following two standardized paragraphs. These paragraphs must be included not only in USDA materials, but in any materials related to USDA AmeriCorps projects produced by RC&D Councils, youth service corps, community colleges, local governments, conservation districts, or other partnering organizations.

AmeriCorps is President Clinton's national service program, passed with bi-partisan 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.



2) AmeriCorps Project Managers and agency public affairs staff are encouraged to solicit local press coverage of their projects -- through interviews, media events, letters to the editor, prepared feature stories, radio actualities, video press releases, etc. However, at all times, AmeriCorps staff and members should emphasize the following:

a. How the projects are "getting things done" achieving concrete results that directly meet community needs.

b. The educational opportunities provided by the voucher;

c. The principles of civic responsibility and community

d. That 1,200 USDA AmeriCorps Members are only a small portion of the 20,000 members of the overall AmeriCorps Program, that most projects are not funded directly by Federal agencies, and that two-thirds of AmeriCorps projects are funded by state commissions appointed by each state's governor.

3) It must be made clear in all communications that AmeriCorps is neither a jobs program nor a pure volunteerism program, but rather a unique new community service initiative. Use the term "select" rather than "hire" and "community service" rather than "job". Use the term "AmeriCorps Member" rather than "employee." Never use the word "volunteer" to describe AmeriCorps Members; the word "volunteer" should only be used to connote uncompensated community residents who volunteer their time to serve part-time in service projects alongside AmeriCorps Members. Also, be careful never to give the false impression that USDA AmeriCorps Members are Federal employees or are performing functions that would normally be performed by Federal employees.

4) Project managers are personally responsible for ensuring that any USDA employee or AmeriCorps Member who communicates with the media is fully conversant with the vision, philosophy, and program design of AmeriCorps.

5) If any national reporters (NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, or major American Dailies, such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Washington Times, the Atlanta Journal/Constitution, the Miami Herald, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, the Kansas City Star, USA Today, etc.) contact a site, the local project manager or public affairs staff should call USDA Director of National Service, Joel Berg, at (202) 720-6350 or USDA/AmeriCorps Coordinator of Communications, Katherine Gibney at (202) 720-4369, before they talk to them or return the call.

6) If a project manager or public affairs staff person feels like an interview did not go well - or suspect that a reporter is working on a story that will have a negative angle-- they should notify the Director or the Coordinator of Communications immediately (listed above); if possible, this notification should occur before the reporter is past deadline.

7) Project managers and agency public affairs staff must make sure that the release of any material to the media by one agency AmeriCorps project is fully coordinated with all the USDA agencies in the state involved in AmeriCorps. In particular, all activities related to recruitment, the National Day of Service, and other coordinated efforts should be combined in one press release that includes all the USDA agencies in the state.

8) New project sites or the recruitment of new members should not be announced to the media before such actions are officially approved by your agency Washington office, the USDA Director of National Service, and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

9) Project managers and agency public affairs staff should collect all media coverage and send immediately to the USDA AmeriCorps office. Please pay particular attention to not only obtaining newspaper clips, but also getting videos of all television coverage and cassettes of all radio coverage. All newspaper clips should be faxed immediately to (202) 720-4614. All hard copies of newsclips, videotapes, and audio cassettes should be mailed to: Katherine Gibney, AG Box 1310, 14th and Independence, SW, Washington, DC 20250-1310.

10) Project managers may be asked to coordinate their site's participation in media activities regarding national events such as the yearly launch of the program, national AmeriCorps satellite video conferences, Earth Day, the National Day of Service, World Food Day, and yearly graduation ceremonies.



Chapter Eleven

Project Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

Site Operating Forms

Once you have been notified of approval, you will be sent Operating Site Forms to complete for each site that AmeriCorps Members will be using as work locations. Complete these forms and return them to agency national headquarters in Washington, D.C. (Appendix U)

The Connection of Objectives to Plans of Work to Quarterly Reports

The service being performed at each site should be able to be tracked from the community service objectives to the plan of work to the quarterly reports. In other words, the objectives should specify exactly what service will be performed, the workplan should specify exactly how that service will be performed, and the quarterly reports should specify exactly how much of that service was actually performed each quarter.

The flow between each site's three document types should be seamless, and easy to follow for even a layperson reading them.

If either the workplan or the achievements reported each quarter do not track directly back to the original community service objectives, then the documents needs to be revised in order to do so.



Writing Community Service Objectives

The single greatest requirement for each USDA AmeriCorps site is to have concrete, measurable, community service objectives.

Each Anti-Hunger and Environmental Team site must have at least five objectives, and each Rural Development Team Member performing an individual task must have an individual community service objective.

Please refer to Chapter 5, "Process for Grant Application", subsection on new applications, for more details on the objectives that should be in each original application.

Objectives are statements of what your program believes will be the result of a year of effort, a statement about what will change. Objectives should be measurable and address what work will get done. Objectives must be specific enough to allow determination of what changes will occur as a result of the efforts, and to whom the benefits will accrue.

A good objective describes the recipient and the desired change. The evaluation portion of a program objective describes the means of determining whether the change occurred, what constitutes "success" or the "impact" resulting from the attainment of the objective, and how this impact will be measured.

Avoid measuring activities that are not at the core of your program's objectives. It may be "nice to know" how many people actually read your brochures on affordable housing, but it is much more important how many people attained affordable housing as a result of your program's efforts.

The objectives set out for your program are of great importance. They provide the direction for your program. They provide a yardstick to measure the progress toward the goals you have articulated. And, well written objectives tell you if you have been successful in reaching your goals.

Be sure that the objectives set out are "outcome" objectives and not "process" objectives. Process objectives say how work will get done-not what work will get done. Holding weekly staff meetings' is a process objective. Producing 15 units of affordable housing in year one is an outcome objective.

So, each objective described in a plan of work should include the following components:

- the work to be done (a product or service to be provided),
- a result of the work,
- a means of measuring the quality or success of the work,
- a standard of quality or success the program hopes to meet, and
- the number of service recipients.

Objectives should be written with great care because they will be the standard by which the success of a program will be measured. Objectives too ambitious or unrealistic can result in a negative evaluation by the Corporation. Spend time thinking through your objectives to be sure they will be achievable, given the skills of the members, the situation in which they will be working, and the time allotted to accomplish the tasks.

Similarly, be sure that your program's objectives are directly tied to measurement of the activity's effectiveness. Counseling small business owners may lead to a more vital business climate. But, it is not demonstrable that the 10 percent increase in local retail sales is directly attributable to your program's efforts. This sales increase could result from any number of other factors. A more reliable measurement would be the sales of those businesses whose owners you counseled, compared with their sales over comparable periods.

It would also be useful to know the "relative" impact of your objectives. Collecting 8000 pounds of recyclable materials is a laudable goal. But what are the estimated total amount of recyclable materials available in the community? Does 8000 pounds represent a meaningful amount? It may not if measured against the total amount of all recyclable material available. It may be quite meaningful if it is 8000 pounds of hazardous materials.

Simply stated, each objective should address all five components listed on the previous page. An example of a community service objective which covers all five components would be:

One hundred county farmers and 50 non-farm land owners will attend a four week training session to be taught how to assess their farmsteads for potential water pollution hazards using the Farmstead Assessment System (FAS). A pre- and post-test of the training will be administered to ensure that all attendees have increased their knowledge of the subject by at least 85 percent; meaning they have gained sufficient knowledge to use the FAS system effectively.

1. The work to be done .

To train rural landowners how to assess their farmsteads groundwater for pollution by using the Farmstead Assessment System (FAS).

2. The result of the work.

Farmers and rural landowners will be trained.

3. Means of measuring the quality of the product or impact of the service.

Pre- and post-tests will be administered to all attendees.

4. Standard of quality or Impact that the program hopes to meet.

All attendees will have increased their knowledge of FAS by at least 85 percent.

5. Number of service recipients.

One hundred and fifty rural dwellers.

Identifying and listing the five components is easier in community service objectives than in community building objectives because they tend to be product oriented. A community building objective related to the community service objective written above could be 'to increase awareness of water quality issues among rural residents'.

All community service objectives should be as concrete and as measurable as possible. Your answers should **not** focus on "process" activities such as meetings held, surveys or inventories completed, citizens informed of programs, but rather should focus on direct benefits to the community, such as: number of trees planted, number of jobs or new businesses created, number of school children educated, number of homes built or repaired, number of (or acres of) conservation practices actually implemented, miles of trail built, percentage improvement in water quality, increase in recycling rate, etc.

In drafting your project objectives, you must use the format on the next page. For multiple objectives, make as many copies of the forms as necessary.



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?



Plan of Work (POW)

Once the community service objectives have been completed, a plan of work (POW) should be developed for each site. Each POW will consist of the following:

1. Overall plan for the year.
2. Weekly work plans.
3. Action plan.
4. Resource plan.

Each AmeriCorps Site, whether for a Team or RDT member, is required to submit a POW to the USDA National Service Office. These plans will form the basis for quarterly progress reports during the year, as well as the end of year accomplishment report which will be submitted to the Corporation.



Yearly POW

Each plan will indicate the following:

- Total number of hours planned for the year.
- Total number of projects. It is vital that a sufficient number of quality projects be selected to last through the year.
- Number of hours per project.
- Type of 'priority program area' designation.
- Number of AmeriCorps Members working at site.
- Number of Agency/community members working at site.
- Number of volunteers.
- List of specific tasks, staff days required to complete each task, projected completion date, and task supervisor.

Action Plan

The action plan will include:

- The objective statement.
- Specific statements describing how the objective will be accomplished.
- Who is responsible.
- Time line for accomplishment of objective.
- Specific tasks to be accomplished each week.



Action plans are essentially a timetable of activities listed by the day, week, month, or quarter (whichever is most appropriate for your program) in which they are to take place. If your site program has several involved objectives, it will be more effective to write an implementation plan for each objective—listing chronologically the action steps to be undertaken until the objective is accomplished. For site programs having one or two straight forward community service objectives, a single implementation plan is preferable.

Weekly POW

Some items to be included in the weekly POW are:

- tasks to be accomplished for the week;
- transportation for crew and equipment;
- arrangements for any needed tools and supplies to be on site;
- personnel needs, for example -PL&E: lunches, water, protective clothing, first aid kits, toilet supplies, etc.
- RDT: reference materials, access to computers,
- transportation needs.
- communications equipment for business and emergency;
- program identity signs for work sites;
- training needs; and

Resource Plan

List all of the resources needed for completion of the objectives.

- Human;
- technological;
- administrative;
- printed material;, and
- any other resources required.

The list should indicate who will be expected to supply the resources, when they are needed and when they will be delivered. The resources plan requires a high degree of specificity, both for the resources required and when they will be needed. This ensures program continuity and will allow your agency, and other Departmental units, time for preparation.

The POW should be approved by each agency's national headquarters and by the community to ensure understanding of expectations.

POW's, when approved, shall be the principal guiding plan for on-site service/work to be accomplished by member/crews. In addition to its value as a planning document, the POW should also facilitate keeping account of member hours, training, costs, and other data needed for accomplishment reporting.

Project supervisors are responsible for development of the POW. However, when possible the members should be encouraged to participate in the development of the POW. This participation creates "buy-in" by everyone and helps to create team spirit. Members and supervisors should also join in feed-back sessions about project activity--with on-going and open dialogue in monitoring and evaluating the project. Both supervisor and members are accountable--perhaps for different things and in different ways--and open discussion of accountability for these roles should be rewarding for individuals and the team collectively. Effective two-way communications is essential in "getting things done" well.

The AmeriCorps Members should know that this work is meaningful and how it fits with the basic objectives of public service through the AmeriCorps Program. Some basic principles how the members can be involved:

- See a project through to an identified completion point.
- Set an achievable individual work standard (pace as well as quality criteria) agreeable to you and your supervisor mutually.
- Find out from a supervisor what can be done to improve work. All community service objectives should be as concrete and as performance and then do it.
- Be proud of the work accomplished.



During the process of drafting the POW, project managers and members should carefully consider the total hours the members will be in the program - 1,812 hours. Within this time frame the member will have to:

- be trained in the service activities they will be expected to perform,
- undertake a program of personal development,
- perform needed service activities for the community, and
- contribute to the overall building of their host community.

The process of writing a plan will bring all of these elements into focus and result in an effective and meaningful experience for the member and the community.

The narrative that follows provides a discussion of each of the planning elements, along with examples. At the end of the discussion, a format for drafting your site plan is provided. You will notice that the form requires certain codes be included. Because the AmeriCorps siting process is not yet complete, site codes are not listed. When complete, the codes will be sent to you under separate cover

Example 1

This objective will require six months for completion, and a plan has been written on a quarter.

Objective One: 100 county farmers and 50 nonfarm land owners will attend a four week training session to be taught how to assess their farmsteads for potential water pollution hazards using the Farmstead Assessment System (FAS). A pre- and post-test of the training will be administered to ensure that all attendees have increased their knowledge of the subject by at least 85 percent; meaning they have gained sufficient knowledge to use the FAS system effectively.

Action Plan-October-December

- A. Contact university specialists, state and federal agencies, and news media to promote upcoming educational programs. Will also be requesting mailing lists and other ways of obtaining potential client lists.
- B. Prepare and send news articles on FAS, conservation farming, water testing, and other aspects of program to all media in the area.
- C. Update and prepare mailing lists and maps of potential target farmers.
- D. Prepare list of local groups and neighborhoods to be contacted.

Action Plan-January-March:

- A. Identify 20 key contacts and leaders in all groups and neighborhoods.
- B. Contact all 20 or more key contacts in neighborhoods and voluntary organizations.
- C. Prepare and send two news articles on FAS and conservation farming.
- D. Hold several neighborhood meetings with small groups on FAS
- E. Finalize attendee list and send out confirmation letters.
- F. Complete four week training of farmers and rural residents.
- G. Pre- and post-test results analyzed.

Example 2

Objective-construct 18 miles of hiking and horseback trails by ten person crew learning work ethics, teamsmanship, safe working practice, job skills, environmental education, and job quality standards.

Action Plan-prior to start up

- A. Mark trail location on ground.
- B. Develop design plans identifying signing, bridges, water bars, universal access, safety, and other trail structure needs. Utilize agency design specifications and standards as required.
- C. Secure appropriate design plan approvals.
- D. Develop project work plans and secure approval.
- E. Develop Hazard Analysis for project.
- F. News release to media about project plan and AmeriCorps participants doing the project.

Action Plan-at start up time-week

- A. orientation to project.
- B. safety training
- C. logistics
- D. work standards and expectations
- E. job training and work activities.

Action Plan-at start up time-weekly

Accomplishment review and evaluation by AmeriCorps members and technical experts.

Action Plan-at start up time-week 28

Complete project, final evaluation.

Action Plan-follow-up

Survey public use activity level and appreciation.
Celebrate accomplishments



Resources

Example Resources

Team training by National Office NRCS water quality specialists in first month of service

Fact sheets and news releases developed by National Office Specialists on safe water quality practices.

One hundred Farmstead Assessment System packages by February 1.

The development of a slide show on tillage methods by State Specialists by February 1.

Delivery of 200 well testing kits and instructions by February .

Bulletins on water quality, tillage, and pesticide management developed by AmeriCorps member.

Obtain NRCS, CFSA, and DNR data on local watershed status in January.



PLAN OF WORK FORMAT

Year: _____

Name: _____

Agency Name: _____

State/Region: _____

Operating Unit: _____

Mission Statement:

Situation Statement:

Objectives and Evaluation Plan:

Action Plan:

Resources:

Plan for Diversity:

CODE



Quarterly Reports

The single most important component of this report is indicating the quantifiable, measurable progress your project has made towards meeting each of your already agreed-upon community service objectives.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) continues to refine each quarter's site reporting format, thus the manual cannot be precise in the format requested for each quarter. However, the following is what we believe will be requested. Following the narrative is a layout of the report in an easy to use form.

- 1) **Operating Site Name, location, Operating Site ID #, Number of Quarter.**

- 2) **Name, title, address, and phone number, fax number, and e-mail address (if available) of person completing report.**

- 3) **Number of Members Serving and Number of Hours Served ---** Each third quarter site report must state the number of full-time Members allotted to the site, the number of full-time Members enrolled on the last day of the third quarter, the number of full-time Members who served the entire third quarter, the total of service hours performed in the second quarter by full-time Members, and the total of service hours performed to date (since the launch of the program) by full-time Members. If your site has part-time Members, all five of the above questions should be answered separately for your part-time Members. Please answer all the above questions about number of Members and hours served on each individual site report, but also please aggregate for your state this information for all the Members sponsored by your agency in the state. Hours in training should be included in these hours and are treated no different than hours in direct service.

- 4) **Number of Non-AmeriCorps Volunteers and Number of Volunteer Hours ---** Each third quarter site report must specify how many non-AmeriCorps unpaid volunteers were recruited in the quarter to serve alongside your AmeriCorps Members, as well as the total number of hours these volunteers served in the quarter. This information is absolutely critical, because it allows us to refute the false charge that AmeriCorps' existence decreases the number of people who volunteer in communities. All our experience proves that AmeriCorps in fact boosts community volunteerism --- that is why our reports need to document that.



5) **Significant changes this quarter:** Explain either staff changes or program changes in this section.

6) **Member Assessment ---** This is to assess the diversity of your teams.

7) **Budget Information.** See pages 165-166.

8) **Comparison of Community Service Objectives Planned With Community Service Objectives Achieved ---** Each quarter site report must re-state its complete set of existing community service objectives, before explaining precisely what progress has been made towards achieving those objectives. Answers should be as concrete and measurable as possible. Answers should **not** focus on "process" activities such as meetings held, surveys or inventories completed, citizens informed of programs, but rather should focus on direct benefits to the community, such as: number of trees planted, number of jobs or new businesses created, number of school children educated, number of homes built or repaired, number of (or acres of) conservation practices actually implemented, miles of trail built, percentage improvement in water quality, increase in recycling rate, etc.

9) **Primary accomplishments in meeting Member development objectives.**

Please specify any progress you have made in boosting the personal development of the Members, i.e., types of training, team building activities, etc.

10) **Primary accomplishments in meeting community building objectives.**

Please amplify how the service your project has performed has begun meeting your community service objectives. Please also specify, using either empirical data or anecdotal stories, other important service you have performed that "get things done" in your community. Please specify any progress you have made in helping local communities build their long-term infrastructures.



11) Other Accomplishments This Quarter "Getting Things Done"

12) Unique Successes or "Great Stories"

13) Primary Challenges Encountered This Quarter

14) Training Needs

15) NATIONAL IDENTITY ACTIVITIES THIS QUARTER

Please report on activities this quarter that fostered the national identity of AmeriCorps. Examples could include signage or publicity materials projects with other AmeriCorps programs, training members in their national skills areas (communication, conflict resolution, or CPR/first aid, participating in citizenship education, graduation or swearing in ceremonies, use of national recruitment, use of AmeriCorps members handbook.

16) MEDIA COVERAGE

Please provide all newspaper or magazine clippings, videotapes of TV news reports, and cassettes of radio news reports.

17) OTHER CREATIVE DOCUMENTATION

We strongly urge you to find other ways to creatively demonstrate the progress of your projects, such as:

- "before and after" photographs and videotapes
- excerpts from journal entries written by Members
- letters of support from satisfied individuals or groups

NOTE: In an effort to make the quarterly reports easier to do you will find on pages 159-172 a format for the quarterly report that you may copy and complete if you desire. Please keep in mind however that this format is subject to change by the CNCS.

Quarterly Report Schedule

Quarterly reports are due --- in both paper and electronic (diskette or e-mail) versions --- from your agency national office to the USDA Director of National Service ten days after the close of each quarter. Each operating site will submit a report to the state or regional office of the agency, which will in turn aggregate the data before forwarding to that agency's national office.

Based on the requirement for the state and regional level; project managers at the local level need to submit their reports in sufficient time to allow state/regions to meet their requirements and submit by the deadline.

If a project starts prior to the start of the Fiscal Year, that time should be included in the first quarter report. Reports should be submitted in both hard copy and in electronic format and in the format shown in the following pages.



Responsibility for Preparing Quarterly Reports

Quarterly reports are a critical part of your reporting requirements. They will serve as the basis to determine your eligibility for project renewal. Also, based on information from the quarterly reports, a consolidated report is prepared and shared with Members of Congress. Consequently, project managers should pay close attention to the accuracy of these reports. Hours reported on time spent doing direct community service need to be as accurate as possible. These hours will be tracked by agency headquarters, the Department, and the CNCS.

Every management level shares a responsibility in the quarterly reporting. Quarterly Reports should pass through the following levels:

1. Project/local level: The report starts at this level. Every operating site is required to submit a quarterly report to their state or regional headquarters.
2. State/Regional level: After receiving reports from all of their operating sites, the Project Director should prepare a consolidated report as a representation of accomplishments in the state or region as a whole. Forward the State/regional report, along with copies of all operating site quarterly reports, to agency national headquarters in Washington, DC. (A copy of a quarterly report for every operating site must be filed with the CNCS.)
3. Agency level: After receiving reports from all states and/or regions, national staff must prepare a consolidated report for the Department.
4. Department level: After receiving reports from all USDA agencies must prepare a report and forward copies of all quarterly reports to the CNCS.



AMERICORPS
QUARTER REPORT

SITE INFORMATION

Operating Site name: _____

State: _____

Site ID # _____

Your Name: _____

Your Position: _____

Telephone number: _____

Fax number: . _____

e-mail address
(if available) _____

Date report completed _____

Reporting Period: _____

Program Start-up date: _____



MEMBER INFORMATION

FULL-TIME MEMBER INFORMATION

Number of Members authorized for your site:
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Number of Members enrolled at end of quarter:
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Number of Members at beginning of quarter:
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Total Hours of Direct Service for previous Quarter: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Total Hours of Direct Service for this Quarter: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Total Hours of Direct Service to Date: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____



PART-TIME MEMBER INFORMATION

Number of Members authorized: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Number of Members enrolled at end of quarter: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Number of Members at beginning of quarter: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Total Hours of Direct Service for previous Quarter: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Total Hours of Direct Service for this Quarter: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____

Total Hours of Direct Service to date: _____
 Environmental Corps Members: _____
 Rural Development Corps Members: _____



VOLUNTEER ASSESSMENT

Non-AmeriCorps Member Volunteers

Total Number of non-AmeriCorps Volunteers:
involved in AmeriCorps service activities in
this quarter _____

Total hours of AmeriCorps service activities:
completed by non-AmeriCorps Member volunteers
in this quarter. _____



SIGNIFICANT CHANGES THIS QUARTER

1. Staff changes made this quarter:

2. Program structural changes made this quarter:

Number of Members who have left National Service
this quarter. _____

Total-to-date _____

Number of Members who have gained employment thru their
AmeriCorps Service _____



**MEMBER ASSESSMENT
as of end of this quarter**

TOTAL AUTHORIZED POSITIONS: _____ **TOTAL EMPLOYED:** _____

TOTAL ENVIRONMENTAL CORPS POSITIONS FILLED _____

TOTAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CORPS POSITIONS FILLED _____

DEMOGRAPHICS OF AMERICORPS MEMBERS

Box 1 - GENDER	
Number of Males	_____
Number of Females	_____
TOTAL	_____

Box 2 - RACE	
Number of Caucasians	_____
Number of African Americans	_____
Number of Native Americans	_____
Number of Hispanics	_____
Number of Asian Americans/Pacific Islander	_____
Other	_____
TOTAL	_____

Box 3 - EDUCATION	
Number w/out High School Diploma or GED	_____
Number with High School or GED	_____
Number with some college	_____
Number with college degree	_____
Number with Graduate degree	_____
Number w/Professional or Trade School	_____
TOTAL	_____

NOTE: Totals in boxes 1-3 should be the same number and should be the same as TOTAL EMPLOYED.

BOX 4 - OTHER	
Number receiving Health Insurance from NRCS	_____
Number receiving Child Care through AmeriCorps	_____
Number of children	_____
Number w/Disabilities	_____



BUDGET INFORMATION

Federal dollars spent on AmeriCorps (Local Level Only)

Project Manager completes this section

Per cent of your time spent on AmeriCorps _____

Approximate dollar amount _____

Cost for any other Federal employee spending time on AmeriCorps _____

Travel costs for Members & Managers _____

Training costs _____

Supplies _____

Uniform costs _____

Program Costs _____

(Please explain what these costs were.)

Partner dollars spent on AmeriCorps

Supplies _____

Travel _____

Training _____

Program Costs _____

Other _____



PROJECT DIRECTOR COSTS (One per State - Above site level costs only,
Do **NOT** include any costs already captured by the Project Manager.

Federal dollars spent on AmeriCorps	
Per cent of your time spent on AmeriCorps	_____
Approximate dollar amount	_____
Cost for any other Federal employee spending time on AmeriCorps	_____
Travel costs for Members & Managers	_____
Training costs	_____
Supplies	_____
Uniform costs	_____
Program Costs (Please explain what these costs were.)	_____

Non-Federal Funds Spent
(Explain) _____



Objectives Section

Objective: (state objective)

Progress towards meeting this community service objectives

(complete this sheet for each objective)



PRIMARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. **Member Development:** Progress made in boosting the personal development of members.

2. **Community Building:** Progress made in meeting your community service objectives.



3. Other Accomplishments:

4. Unique Successes or "Great Stories":



PRIMARY CHALLENGES

Report on problems resolved and unresolved, obstacles to achieving program objectives, significant sources of delay, program elements not meeting expectations, events or incidents that caused concern. Use the format below for explaining problems and solutions.

NATURE OF PROBLEM

Please state the problem clearly and concisely. Be candid.

HAS THE PROBLEM BEEN RESOLVED?

IF NO, WHAT STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM?

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE SOLUTION OR RESOURCES NEEDED TO RESOLVE THIS PROBLEM?

Specify what steps you, your Members, USDA, and/or the Corporation for National Service can take to rectify the problems or at least ensure they do not recur in the future



TRAINING ASSESSMENT

PRIMARY TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS

Please specify precisely what kind of staff or Member training or other technical assistance can be provided by USDA, the Corporation for National and Community Service, or other sources to improve your project.



MEDIA ASSESSMENT

1. NATIONAL IDENTITY ACTIVITIES THIS QUARTER

2. MEDIA COVERAGE

3. OTHER CREATIVE DOCUMENTATION

Chapter Twelve

Health, Safety, And Accident Control

Purpose

This chapter provides guidance on the Health, Safety and Accident Control Program. This program is directed toward reducing errors and risks, and protecting the physical and mental health of members and staff while participating in all project activities. The CNCS requires that projects institute safeguards as necessary and appropriate to ensure the safety of participants.

Basic Direction

Each residential and nonresidential project must have a complete safety and health plan. This plan shall be integrated with and comply with the overall health, safety, and accident control policies of the administering agency. Policies now in effect in each employing agency are adequate for the development of each plan. The AmeriCorps/USDA project/program shall use existing USDA and agency forms for injury, illness, and accident reporting. Work supervisors will need to maintain close and continuous supervision of work crews.



Minimum Requirements

Rescue and emergency medical aid plans shall be set up for each project to cover injuries or illness occurring at camp or on the job. The plan must detail each step to be taken from onset of the injury or illness to professional treatment.

Specific safety and health plans and/or a job hazard analysis covering all areas of members activity including trips, recreation, and work are required. No member may be ordered or allowed to perform work of a hazardous nature without authorization and certification.

Public safety programs and other programs posing a significant risk to members must adhere to applicable provisions to the safety protocol issued by the CNCS.

Project managers must have prior written approval from CNCS for members to participate in forest fire related activities and other natural/man-caused disasters (floods, earthquakes, etc). Members shall meet the same physical fitness and training requirements as organized agency crews. Agencies must ensure that qualified overhead personnel are assigned to manage crews in all incidents.

Environmental Team project managers may wish to develop some type of physical fitness program. Most youth corps do have a program of this type.



Safety Awareness Training-training should provide clear guidelines for member safety as well as specific procedures to help ensure safety. Training should occur in preservice settings as well as during service. The training should include sessions on

- avoiding dangerous situations,
- procedures for obtaining immediate assistance in the event of an emergency, including explicit guidelines for reacting to dangerous or threatening situations,
- becoming familiar with the community,
- interaction with supervisors and other AmeriCorps members, and
- prevention of occupational hazards.

Safety Precautions-projects must take all appropriate precautions to help ensure the safety of members. Recommended precautionary measures include

- assignment during daylight hours and enhanced security for carefully planned activities during evening hours;
- service activities which are appropriate for the members' age and abilities;
- safe passage, safe areas, and escorts, if necessary, to and from the service site;
- assignment of members in pairs or groups;
- coordination of safety plan with local law enforcement agency and possible increase in police surveillance in service sites;



-
- provision of communications equipment, if available; issuance of distinctive clothing; and
 - close monitoring of member activities by immediate supervisors and project coordinator.

Caution must be exercised in permitting members under 18 years of age to work on projects which consist of work described as hazardous by Federal laws and regulations. Certain tasks will require a clearance before these youths can be authorized to undertake them. Hazardous work is defined in the child labor bulletins. Examples are:

1. Members under 18 may not operate power-driven circular saws, bandsaws, or chain saws.
2. Members under 18 may not operate Government vehicles.

Members should have a tetanus booster shot or a current shot record. Any serious scratch or puncture wound requires immediate treatment by a physician, regardless of recency of tetanus inoculation.

Each project must develop a system to facilitate locating any member whenever necessary. Residential projects carry a 24-hour-per-day responsibility for safety, health, and well-being of the member. This responsibility requires some form of staff coverage which must be exercised on an assigned basis.

During the beginning weeks of the project, members and "when needed staff" will receive training in:

- defensive driving,
- vehicle handling,
- tool use,
- fire suppression,
- CPR,
- first aid, and
- sanitary food handling.

Swimming tests should also be given to members as appropriate. There will be additional tool training at the beginning of each work project. "Tail-gate safety sessions" should be used to re-emphasize the safe use of tools and increase awareness of other potential hazards.

Member Acknowledgment Form

At Appendix V is a form which should be used by projects and completed by all members. It serves as an acknowledgment by each AmeriCorps member (in the case of members under 18 years of age, by their parents or guardians) that the USDA AmeriCorps Program projects - despite appropriate training-policy guidelines and other reasonable precautions, may involve some safety risk.



Reporting An Emergency

In cases of accident or injury:

1. Take whatever steps necessary to ensure the safety and health of the member(s) (apply first aid, CPR, take member to the hospital/doctor).

2. In the case of severe or serious injury, notify agency headquarters **NOW**.

3. Complete paperwork. Complete form CA-1 and any other paperwork necessary in the circumstances.

3. If not previously notified, notify agency national headquarters and send copy of paperwork.



Chapter Thirteen Project Close Out

General

At the close of each project, project managers and directors will be required to perform certain close out tasks. It is the responsibility to ensure that these tasks are completed in timely manner.

Project Close Out

The following items must be accomplished.

1. Member must complete a Member Exit Form.
2. Project Managers must complete an "End-of-Term-of-Service form".
3. Project managers must complete the Annual Accomplishment Survey-to be provided.
4. Three months prior to end of project, notify agency headquarters of the members currently receiving child care benefits.
5. USDA Office of National Service will notify the Corporation three months prior to end of term of service for member's receiving child care benefits.



Site Graduation

Since each USDA project progresses at a different pace, the Department will **not** set a standard graduation date for the program. It is up to the judgment of the project manager to set a date for a ceremony when all or most of the site's members have completed their 1,812 hours of service. However, whenever possible, all USDA agency projects in the same geographical area should have the same graduation ceremony. Each site will receive --- through the state or regional facilitator -- permanent signs with an AmeriCorps logo and the Heading, "A project of AmeriCorps, United States Department of Agriculture." These signs are to be posted at physical worksites so that or AmeriCorps Members and staff can take lasting credit for the wonderful work they have performed throughout America -- just as alumni of the original CCC can now view plaques at the sites they constructed throughout the country. The installation of these signs should be incorporated into site graduation ceremonies, particularly if the project has built, repaired, or renovated physical sites -- such as homes, trailheads, timber bridges, kiosks, soup kitchens, community gardens, public parks, environmental education centers, campgrounds, etc. Sites may choose to sponsor a caravan or parade in the area in which the members ride or walk from physical site to physical site, installing the permanent signs at each sites. Project managers should invite media, elected officials, and other permanent community leaders.



Glossary Of Terms

AmeriCorps Program

A coordinated group of activities linked by common elements such as recruitment, selection and training of participants and staff, regular a-group activities and assignment of projects organized for/he purpose of achieving the mission and goals of national service.

Anti-Hunger Team

Run in conjunction with anti-hunger organizations and/or youth service corps. Members in this category are required to work with other team members (a minimum of five). There is no age restriction; educational background is varied (from those without a high school diploma to those with a Ph.D.) and teams are required to be diverse in their makeup (age, race, educational background, and gender).

Cluster Requirement

Rural Development Team Members are required to meet at least once a month in order to increase their awareness of the larger concept of AmeriCorps and National Service. This time also gives them the opportunity to share concerns and ideas. They may also come together to participate in group projects.

CNCS

The Corporation for National and Community Service is the new Federal cooperation that funds and oversees the AmeriCorps Program, as well as other domestic service and volunteer programs.

GED

General Equivalency/Diploma. A degree obtained by examination which may substitute for a high school diploma. An individual must agree to obtain a GED or high school diploma before using the AmeriCorps education award.

Member

The official word to describe a participant in AmeriCorps who is earning a living allowance and serving hours towards an educational award

National Headquarters (NHQ)

Refers to Agency Headquarters in Washington, DC.



National Identity

The sense of purpose and membership in a common program that all AmeriCorps Members share. National identity can be strengthened by everything from buttons and T-shirts to reflection activities, common national service projects, and civic education.

National Service Trust Fund

Also "Trust Fund " or "Trust." A trust fund in the United States Treasury Department established by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 to finance AmeriCorps education awards.

NFC

The National Finance Center is the USDA office that processes payroll and reimbursement checks for both AmeriCorps Members and USDA employees.

Nondisplacement

AmeriCorps members cannot perform any services that would result in a paid employee losing a job.

Operating Site

An operating site is the lowest possible unit at which AmeriCorps Members report to work each day. Thus, each Environmental Team location at which the Members meet daily would be an operating site. For Rural Development Teams, if the Members in a cluster report to the same office at the county level, then that office is the operating site. If, however, five Members in a cluster each report daily to different offices, then each of those offices must be listed individually as operating sites.

Program

Applies to the entire USDA AmeriCorps Program.

Project

Applies to individual site locations.

Project Director

Refers to individual located at State level tasked with responsibility for the AmeriCorps Program.

Project Manager

Refers to individual located at local level tasked with responsibility for the AmeriCorps Project.

Public Lands and Environmental Corps Members

Members in this category are required to work with other team members (a minimum of five). There is no age restriction; educational background is varied (from those without a high school diploma to those with a Ph.D.) and teams are required to be diverse in their makeup (age, race, educational background, and gender).

Rural Development Team

The Rural Development Team is a component of the USDA program that requires at least a Bachelor Degree for most Members, pays a higher living allowance than the Public Lands and Environmental Corps or the Anti-Hunger Corps, and allows the members to service daily in individual placements rather than work in crews.

Rural Development Team Member

A member who is entitled to a higher wage based on educational background or on personal expertise and knowledge gained through experience. In general, a minimum of two years of college is required for a position on a Rural Development Team. This requirement can be waived if the applicant possesses a significant degree of expertise which he/she has gained through employment experience. These individuals have the ability to work independently. Rural Development Teams are expected to be diverse in their makeup.

State Commission

A 15-25 member, independent, bipartisan commission appointed by a governor to implement service programs in the State. Each State Commission receives funding from the Corporation and is overseen by an executive director. The State Commission's duties include developing a State plan, submitting the State application to the Corporation, and overseeing funded AmeriCorps programs.

USDA AmeriCorps Program

Refers to the AmeriCorps Program sponsored and run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Volunteer

The word "volunteer" should only be used to connote uncompensated community residents who volunteer their time to serve part-time in service projects alongside AmeriCorps Members. Never use the word "volunteer" to describe actual AmeriCorps Members.

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