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2013-0661-F
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RESTRICTION CODES**Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]**

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

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RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

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- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
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- b(4) Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA]
- b(6) Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]
- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

Clinton Presidential Records Digital Records Marker

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This marker identifies the place of a tabbed divider. Given our digitization capabilities, we are sometimes unable to adequately scan such dividers. The title from the original document is indicated below.

April

Divider Title: _____

April 23, 1995

TO: Lloyd, Paula, Dee
FROM: Joel *JB*
Subject: Urgent Revisions Needed on Almost All NRCS Applications

As you know, I have already provided, in an April 21 memo, comments on the preliminary information I received on Arizona, Arkansas, California, and Florida.

Below are my full comments on materials I have received on other sites. I will have additional comments when I receive the outstanding objectives and narratives that I still have not received. As you know, these outstanding materials are overdue more than a week past our mutually agreed-upon deadline.

Some of the objectives and narratives require simple clarification, but those marked with an asterisk (*) are so problematic as written that I will not be able to include them in the Departmental application if not completely overhauled within days.

Many of the NRCS applications and objectives propose activities that violate the National and Community Service Act of 1993, the regulations of the Corporation for National and Community Service, and/or the general program design of AmeriCorps. Virtually every site has serious problems. Such problems should have been corrected before the materials ever reached my office.

It is particularly bothersome to note that these partial applications and objectives repeat many of the worst mistakes that have hampered NRCS AmeriCorps projects throughout this year. Thus, it is clear that almost none of the substantive changes repeatedly requested of NRCS AmeriCorps projects by my office and by the Corporation for National and Community Service have ever been effectively communicated to your project managers in the field.

As you know, last year, the then-SCS applications had similar problems and my staff and I were forced to personally re-write literally hundreds of pages of materials ourselves in one week's time. This created great problems, including the fact that your project managers in the field were never notified about the changes we agreed to in Washington.

As you recall, the multitude of unclear objectives, unfocused narratives, and typographical and formatting errors in our application last year almost prevented the entire Rural Development Team from being funded in the first place.

NRCS promised that this year would be different. For my part, I met with you at length last Fall about the process. A few days after the meeting, per your quest, I wrote and provided to you -- and all other agencies --- detailed information about the renewal process.

Here's how one agency --- the Forest Service --- responded: The Forest Service sent out a notification to the field October 15, requesting preliminary proposals by November 14. The agency then presented all proposals to me for review and, on November, 23 sent notification to the field as to which preliminary proposals were finalists. On December 5-7, the Forest Service held a workshop in Atlanta with all finalists, which they asked me to attend to fully discuss all possible application issues.

It is no surprise, therefore, that all the Forest Service applications were provided to my office on time, in one carefully arranged document, in both electronic and paper formats. It is no surprise that, since I reviewed the applications months ago and requested changes, the final applications required virtually no changes at all.

I am not relating this information in order to re-hash the past, but to simply to point out that NRCS now has a few days in which to accomplish work that should have been completed over the course of the last few months.

This overhaul project needs major additional staff help --- right now --- or the entire NRCS AmeriCorps program will be in jeopardy. I need all these corrections and missing materials by COB, Wednesday, April 26.

Perhaps Dave White or others in the NRCS Washington office with AmeriCorps expertise can be tasked to this project over the next few days. Perhaps you can also fly to Washington some of your best AmeriCorps project managers from the field to help.

I would like to meet with you on Wednesday, when I return from travel, to follow-up with you on this. In the meantime, if you would like to discuss anything with me, please beep me at 1-800-SKY-PAGE, pin # 5708679.

New Comments by site:

Arizona (4 Corners)

* New Mexico narrative lists as main accomplish: "contacts and network the Members were able to establish." All the other accomplishments listed related to trainings and conferences. Much more specific and concrete accomplishments are needed.

* Utah narrative is unclear about precisely what service will be performed next year.

Comments on objectives already provided.

Arkansas

Narrative still missing.

Comments on objectives already provided.

California

Narrative is still missing.

Comments on objectives already provided.

Florida

Comments on narratives and objectives already provided.

Georgia

* The summary is extremely vague about how precisely the program will work next year and exactly what service the Members will perform. * Objective 1 is unclear about how many plants will be grown, what types of plant will be grown, and who will do the actual planting work. Objective 2 is unclear how the success of the educational program will be judged. What is the goal for "acceptance by schools" or quizzes given to students. * Objective 3 is unclear about how many feet of streambanks will be stabilized and exactly how water quality will be improved.

Hawaii

* The narrative is highly unclear about what type of service the Members would be providing. In addition, the proposal seems to confuse a service-learning project -- in which students perform part-time service while attending college -- from an AmeriCorps project. Also, the cover sheets, the objectives, and the narrative are all different over how many members there will be and whether they will be RDT or EN Members. * Their objective is so vague and diffuse that it is impossible to tell what the members will be doing. The focus seems to be on the education obtained by the members, not the service to be provided to the community.

Idaho

The narrative is generally excellent, but I need more specifics on how full-time and part-time members will interact. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 is fine. Objective 3 is fine.

Illinois

* The Chicago narrative is unacceptably vague about accomplishments. The application needs specifics on gardens created and streambanks stabilized, not buzz words like "successful establishment of primary liaison roles." * Objective 1 is totally unclear about what the community workshops will actually accomplish. * Objective 2 is unclear about what service the Members will actually perform once they are recruited.

* Chicago objective 3 is unclear about how many nurseries or plants will be created. Objective 4 is unclear about how the success of the educational program will be judged. * Objective 5 does not specify how many outdoor classrooms will be created or how their success will be judged. Objective 6 is fine.

The East. St. Louis narrative is fine. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 is unclear about how the impact of the community gardening will be measured. * Objective 3 needs more specifics on how the tree planting plan will be created and how this will be applied? How is this different that routine Forest service work? Should this really be a RDT project?

Iowa

Both the narrative and the objectives are totally missing for Iowa.

Kansas

The Kansas application is very confusing, with many different projects. It is unclear which narratives are matched to which objectives. Need clarification of how many Members will be at each site, how many will be part-time, and full-time, and precisely how the part-time and full-time Members will interact.

Wetland and riparian narrative is fine. Wetland and riparian objective 1 is fine.

Big Creek narrative is fine. Big Creek objective 1 is fine. Big Creek objective 2 is unclear how many feet or miles long the trail will be. Big Creek objective 3 is unclear about the size of the stream channel to be cleaned-up.

Parks and Wildlife restoration team narrative is very strong in describing this year's accomplishments, but provides no information at all about the service to be provided next year. Parks and Wildlife restoration team objectives 1 - 3 provide no details about the number of facilities to be maintained, restored, or built.

Louisiana

The Louisiana renewal narrative is fine. * Objective 1 is unacceptably similar to public affairs work that should really be performed by USDA employees on our public affairs staffs. Objective 2 is fine. Objective 3 is fine. Objective 4 is fine.

* The Wetlands Environmental Corps narrative needs to explain how the plants are directly helping the local environment, not just proving research data. * Objective 5 should be dropped -- training of Members is not a community service objective. * Objectives 6 and 7 need to be re-defined to explain a benefit beyond research. Objective 8 is fine. Objective 9 is fine.

Maine

Blueberry/Watersheds narrative is vague. * Objective 12 covers too many areas and does not provide numerical specifics on any one goal. * Objective 13, which seeks to "change the negative perception of the claim industry," seems to be impermissible lobbying. What direct service will be performed by the member and how many people will benefit? Objective 14 is unclear about how growers will express satisfaction with the program and how many will adopt BPM's.

Casco Bay Watershed I narrative is fine. * Objective 24 needs specifics on the number of conservation practices implemented and how the improvement in water quality will be judged. Objective 25 needs specifics on how the improvement in water quality will be judged. Objective 26 needs specific goal on how many landowners apply uniform water quality standards.

Camp Road water Quality narrative is fine. What is the goal for % decrease in erosion or % decrease in need for road maintenance?

Caribou Trails narrative is fine. Site has no objectives.

Damariscota River Watershed narrative is fine. * Objective 18 needs to specify how the improvement of water quality will be measured. * Objective 19 needs to specify how the success of the environmental education will be measured. * Objective 20 needs to give a goal of the percentage of shad eggs that will be successfully reared.

Cranberry Water Quality narrative is fine. * Objective 1 needs specifics on how quality of education will be rated and exactly how many citizens will receive education. Objective 2 is fine.

Environmental Education Circuit Rider narrative is fine. Objective 21 is fine. Objective 22 is fine. Objective 23 is fine.

Fisheries/Water Quality I narrative is fine. Site have no objective.

Fish River Lakes Water Quality narrative is fine. Site has no objective.

Casco bay Watershed II narrative is fine. Site has no objective.

Fishers/Water Quality II narrative is fine. Site has no objective.

* MACD Conservation Education Coordinator narrative should have more focus on providing direct environmental education, instead of just facilitating the education provided by others. Member should be in school rooms. * Objective 6 needs to specify how increased understanding of water quality issues will be measured. * Objective 7 needs to demonstrate how the member will actually teach, not just provide logistical support to the program. * Objective 8 again needs to be changed to reflect direct community service; a major duty should never be to "prepare correspondence.

Marine Education center narrative is fine. Site has no objective.

Salmonoid narrative should delete reference to bi-monthly press release and should increase its focus on direct community service by the member.

St. Croix Watershed narrative is vague. * Objective 9 is too vague, outlines too many issue areas, and give no specific numerical goals or measures for any one project. * Objective 10 needs specifics about how many school children will receive presentations and how those presentations will be evaluated. * Objective 11 needs to specify how many forest operators will adopt BMPO , how many landowners will directly benefit, and how the improvement of water quality will be measured and judged.

Water Quality/Forestry Education narrative is fine. * Objective 1 needs more specifics on what % of growers will implement the IPM program and exactly how many will receive direct service from the members. * Objective 2 needs more specifics of how improvement in water quality will be measured, how the decrease in erosion will be measured, and how many growers will participate.

Water Quality/Rural Development coordinator in Houlton is missing narrative. Objective 15 needs specifics on how project will impact upon water quality. * Objective 16 covers too many issues and gives no specific numerical goal for any issue. * Objective needs specific numerical goal for increase in recycling.

Maryland/DC

Maryland and DC narrative is excellent in outlining this year's accomplishments, but lists absolutely no service projects for next year. Objective 1 needs specific goal for number of volunteers to be recruited. Objective 2 needs a % for reduction in streambank erosion * Objective 3 needs more specifics on how many facilities will be constructed and on how exactly they will be used.

Southern Maryland narrative looks good on paper, but the service projects seem much too diffuse and ambitious for the few members we are allocating.. Tree and shore grass planting objective is fine. Forest buffer objective is fine. * Recycling objective needs specific goals for waste reduction, and can not give the impression members will spend their year writing grants. * The three recycling education objective should be re-defined to focus on outreach, not media affairs. * The museum objective must take out all fundraising activities, which are illegal.

Massachusetts

Barnstable narrative is fine, except how will two members in the Team join with a cluster? Objectives should specify how many volunteers will be included and how effectiveness of fisheries project will be measured.

Cranberry Bog narrative is fine. * Objective need to be much more specific about how water quality improvements will be released.

Environmental education narrative is fine and objective is fine.

Water quality team improvement team narrative is fine, but objective needs specifics on how many volunteers

Michigan

Narrative is fine and objectives 1 and 2 are fine (yeh!!).

Minnesota

Minnesota River Basin narrative is fine. Objective 7 needs to be clearer about how reduction in flooding or improvement in water quality will be measured. Objective 8 is fine. Objective needs specific goal for the number of wildlife shelters to be created.

River Beautification and Flood Control Project is fine. Objective 10 is fine. Objective 11 needs to be clearer about how many wildlife shelters will be created and how their impact on wildlife will be measured. Objective 12 needs to specify how many trees and shrubs will be planted.

Mississippi

Narrative missing. Objective 1 needs specifics on how tourism will actually be increased or how jobs will be created. Objective 2 is fine. Objective 3 is fine. Objective 4 is fine. * Objective 5 is totally, absolutely unacceptable. AmeriCorps members can not spend their year performing "public relations." By law, they can not help other entities apply for AmeriCorps funding through their state commission. Objective 6 needs to specify how exactly the woodworkers association will create jobs and help the local economy. Objective 7 needs to be more ambitious. Other dry fire hydrant projects will install far more than 8 dry fire hydrants in a year.

Missouri

Narrative is fine. Objective 1 is fine. (Yeh!!)

Nebraska

All the narratives are missing.

* Five Rivers RC&D, Loess Hills RC&d, and South Central RC&D, objectives 1-5 are exactly the same so my comments are the same for both. * Objective 1 needs to specify how much waste will be recycled. * Objective 2 needs to explain how access to the on-line service will concretely help community residents. * Objective 3 needs to specify how the seminars will actually improve community health.

Objective 4 needs to specify how completing the community surveys will directly improve the lives of local citizens. * Objective 5 needs to specify how NCIP participation will directly help community residents.

Loup Basin RC&D, North Central RC&D, Northeast RC&D, Panhandle RC&D, Southwest RC&D objectives 1-5 are exactly the same, so my comments for the both are the same. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 needs to explain how the 10% increase in tourism will be measured. * Objective 3 is extremely unclear about what specific projects will be completed and how many volunteers will be included. Objective 4 is fine. Objective 5 needs to be much more specific about how the planning activities will actually result in a 10% increase in jobs related to tourism.

New Hampshire

* The New Hampshire resource Revitalization Team narrative is unacceptable because it gives the impression we are simply adding staff to the RC&D councils. The Communications Coordinator position is unacceptable, because the Member would be performing public relations work, not direct service. The Organizational Specialist position is unacceptable because the member would be providing "organizational support," not direct service. * Objective 1 is so diffuse and vague it is meaningless.

* The Fire protection narrative is based on a good idea, but one Rural Development team Member cannot manage the work of others; as we have previously discussed, Rural Development Team Members can only manage the work of environmental Team Members. All members should share information and education duties; one member should not be an Information and Education Coordinator, in effect serving as public affairs staff. Objective 2 is fine.

New Jersey

* Raritan Watershed Restoration narrative is unclear about precisely which service needs to be performed next year. * Objective 1 is unclear about what the Members will do other than office work and data entry; how will this information be used to directly change conservation practices? * Objective 2 unclear about exactly what kind of projects will be implemented and how the reduction in erosion will be measured. * Objective 3 is unclear about what gardens or trails will be established.

* Musconetcong restoration narrative is unclear about precisely which service needs to be performed next year. * Objective 1 is unclear about what stabilization projects will be performed and what they will accomplish. Objective 2 unclear about exactly how the success of the environmental education will be measured. * Objective 3 is unclear about how the inventory will actually improve conservation practices.

* Conservation education narrative is missing. * Objective 1 is absolutely unacceptable because it basic assigns the member to nothing but public affairs duties.

* Beamerville Watershed Restoration narrative is unclear about precisely which service needs to be performed next year. * Objective 1 is unclear about what the Members will do other than collect information; how will this information be used to directly change conservation practices? Objective 2 is fine. * Objective 3 is extremely vague about help to be provided to other AmeriCorps Teams. Objective 4 is fine. * Objective 5 is unacceptable because it is public affairs work and because, as worded, the member would be engaged in the kinds of issue advocacy illegal under the national and Community Service Act of 1993.

In addition, these sites ---with three Members each -- do not meet cluster requirements.

New York

GIS narrative is fine. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 is fine.

URP narrative seems fine, but how have the issues relating to the City Volunteer Corps partnership been worked out? * Objective 1 needs to be more specific about # of acres revitalized, number of trees planted, and number and length of trails developed. * Objective 2 needs to be much more specific about service to be performed. * Objective 3 is an unacceptable "community service" objective, because it focus on Member development.

North Carolina

Educational and public safety program narrative is fine. * Objective 1 needs specifics of number and length of trails to be created, as well as number of children to receive environmental education. * Objective 2 needs specifics on exactly how much wood waste will be recycled.

* Objective 3 needs to be more specific about direct service Members will perform and how that will actually increase tourism.

Dry fire hydrant narrative is fine. * Objective 4 and 5 are in conflict over whether 3,411 dry fire hydrants will be installed by end of this year or whether only 25% of that number will be installed. Also, it is unacceptable to state that the success will be measured by statistics that will be available after 1999. * Objective 6 needs to be more specific about how many intake points will be identified.

Learning centers narrative is fine. * Objective 7 needs specifics of number and length of trails to be created, as well as number of children to receive environmental education. * Objective 8 need to be much more specific about what Members will construct and how that will impact upon environmental education. * Objective 9 needs to be more specific about direct service Members will perform and how that will actually increase tourism.

Trout streams renovation narrative is fine. * Objective 10 needs to be specific about what exactly Members will do to the streams, how water quality will be improved, and how the increase in tourism will be measured. * Objective 11 is extremely vague; how will inventory be used to directly impact conservation practices? * Objective 12 needs to be specific about how much debris will be removed, how many fish habitats will be created, and how that will impact upon water quality.

North Dakota

* The North Dakota narrative is unacceptable because it focuses on data collection instead of direct service to improve conservation measures. All the objectives are missing.

Ohio

* The renewal narrative provides almost no information about what service the members will perform next year. * Objective 8 needs more specific information on how the success of the service will be measured. Objective 9 should explain not only how educational documents will be developed, but how member will provide direct service teaching. Objective 10 needs more specific information about how the improved water quality will be measured.

* The urban Ecosystem Awareness narrative is unclear about how five Members, scattered throughout a very large state, will meet the cluster requirements. the narrative is also very vague about what service the members will actually perform.

* Objective 1 needs specifics on how many volunteers will be recruited, how many hours they will serve, and what projects they will actually complete. * Objective 2 is unacceptable because it focuses on "creating a newsletter" and performing other support activities instead of focusing on direct service. * Objective 3 needs specifics on how many volunteers will be recruited, how many hours they will serve, and what projects they will actually complete. * Objectives 4 is unacceptable because it focus on data collection instead of direct service. * Objectives 5, 6, and 7 are unacceptable because they are too diffuse and have no specific goals for any of the tasks listed.

Oklahoma

* The renewal narrative needs to be much more specific about how the service will be performed next year. Objective 1 should give a way to measure how much the erosion will be reduced. * Objective 2 should be re-written to focus on person-to-person outreach, not media activities. Objective 3 is fine.

The Multi-Cultural Resources Awareness project narrative is fine. * Objective 4 needs to specify exactly what the members will do, how many school children they will educate, and how the success of that education will be measured. * Objective 5 is unacceptable because it focuses on public affairs activities, not direct service. * Objective 6 is an unacceptable community service objective because it focuses on benefits to the members, not to the community.

Oregon

Portland narrative provides no information about service planned for next year. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 should be clarified as to which of the listed "possible" projects will actually be completed. Objective 3 is fine. Object 4 is fine.

* In the Grant's Pass Project, all the site narratives are unclear about what direct service will be performed next year. Members seem to be "coordinating," "optimizing participation," etc. They seem to simply be extra staff for the partner agencies. How will they actually be implementing project that improve the environment and/or create jobs. * The Coos County objective 1 is unacceptable because it says nothing about how actual direct service will be performed.

* The Curry County objective is unclear about how many new volunteers will be recruited and what service they will actually perform. * All four Douglass County objectives are unacceptable because they focus on "facilitating meetings," not direct service. * The three Jackson County objective are all unacceptable because they focus on helping implement committees, not provide direct service. .

South Carolina

The narrative needs more specifics about how the program will operate throughout the state next year. Objective 1 is fine. * Objective 2 needs to specifically a goal for improvement in water quality and how that will be measured.

Objective 3 is fine. Objective 4 is fine. * Objective 5 needs to be more narrowly defined and more specific about how the habitat improvement will be measured. * Objective 6 needs to be clarified as to whether the goal is "5,000" or "50,000" hours of volunteer service.

South Dakota

South Dakota is missing all its narrative.

* Environmental objectives 1 and 2 unclear about how all the data gathering will actually improve the lives of the reservation residents. Given the fact that Todd County has one of the very highest unemployment and poverty rates in the nation, is inventory work really the most helpful service that can be performed by AmeriCorps? Environmental objective 3 is partially ok because it includes some direct seedling-planting service, but again it focuses on data collection. Objective 4 is fine, assuming it is for an environmental team crew leader. Objective 5 is fine.

Texas

Narrative needs more information on projects planned for next year.

Objective 1 needs specific information about the square feet of shoreline protected and the decrease in erosion.

Site needs more objectives.

Vermont

Winooski narrative needs to focus more on implementing actual conservation projects, and not just more "research" such activities must be primary, not to be conducted, as the narrative says, "As time and resources permit." * Objective 3 must be changed to focus on actual conservation implementation, not just research. The regulations of the Corporation for National and Community service prohibit members from spending a year solely conducting research.

Dry fire hydrant narrative is fine. Objective 2 is fine. Objective 3 needs to be totally redefined top focus on personal outreach, not public affairs activities or fundraising activities; fundraising is a violation of AmeriCorps regulations.

Virginia

New Rivers Highland narrative is fine. Objective 6 is fine. * Objective 7 should be totally redefined to focus on presentations to groups, not media work. * Objective 8 needs to be clearer about how planning will actually reduce erosion and how much the erosion will actually be reduced.

Piankatank Watershed is missing narrative. * Objective 5 needs specifics on how water quality will actually be improved.

Forestry project is missing narrative. * Objective 3 must be specific about how forest resources will actually be protected.

Keyserville narrative is fine. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 needs to specify how 10% increase in tourism will be measured. Objective 3 needs to specify exactly how many feet of streambank or square feet of watershed will be affected.

Washington

Goldendale renewal narrative is fine. RDT Objective 1 is fine. RDT Objective 2 needs to specify a better way of testing students and surveying teachers to determine the success of the environmental education. RDT Objective 3 needs to be more specific about projects. ENV objective 1 is fine. ENV objective 2 needs more specifics.

* The World Conservation Corps narrative is unacceptable because it describes AmeriCorps as a jobs program, a job training program, and an education program rather than a service program. The proposal is to limit the ages of the Members to 24 years of age; this violates USDA policy, it increases the likelihood of members dropping-out, and decreases diversity. How will be USDA AmeriCorps members be distinct from the King County World Conservation Corps, with whom they will be working? The narrative is also very vague about the services to be performed by the Members

- * Objective 1 needs specifics on acres of green spaces revegetated, number of trees planted, etc.
- * Objective 2 needs to be much more specific on what stream enhancement activities the members will actually performed.
- * Objective 3 needs to much more specific about the projects to be continued.
- * Objective 4 is unacceptable because it is unclear whether members will perform office support or planning work, or whether they will perform direct service; needs specifics.
- * Objective 5 is an unacceptable community service objective because it focuses on benefits to the members, not to the community.

West Virginia

Narrative is fine, except for more details needed on Limited Resource Farmer Assistance projects for next year. Objective 1 is fine. Objective 2 is fine.

- * Objective 3 needs to be narrowed and specific goals listed and explained.

CC: Tom Hebert

April 23, 1995

To: Lou Woltering, John Seymour
From: Joel Berg
Subject: Additional Information on FS Applications

The Public Lands applications are excellent and ready for submission with no additional changes need from me, except that Ron may request budgetary or administrative clarifications after he reviews the materials.

Most RDT applications have been significantly improved. Please thank all your field coordinators for responding positively to my constructive criticism. I really do appreciate this partnership. However, I still have some concerns over the following objectives:

GA 1 - Still needs more specifics on how many school children will receive environmental education and/or how many more tourists will be brought to area.

NC 1 - Still too focused on creating a plan without concrete results evident for two years.

TN- 2 - Needs to delete reference to grant writing, because it gives the impression that Member would be violating CNCS regulations against fundraising.

LA-2 - Objective states that 50% of event attendees will come from outside the county, but it doesn't state what percentage come from outside the county now.

Mancos, CO - Needs specifics on how economic model will actually create businesses or jobs.

Monticello, UT - Needs specifics on increases in motel bookings or tax revenues.

Dolores, CO - Need specifics about how putting information out electronically will actually increase tourism.

Durango, CO - Needs more specifics on how database will directly improve the lives of residents.

I would appreciate your help in obtaining re-written objectives for those sites to me by COB. Thank you for your help.

March 9, 1995

To: Lou Woltering, AmeriCorps Coordinator, Forest Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service, USDA

Subject: Next's Years Rural Development Team AmeriCorps Projects

First, I want to congratulate all the Forest Service employees and AmeriCorps Members who are involved in the Rural Development Team. They have made great strides "getting things" done while promoting community, opportunity, and responsibility. They are helping write an important new chapter of American history.

However, after reviewing the proposals from the field for next year, I have serious concerns about our ability to continue Rural Development Team projects sponsored by the Forest Service. In general, I have the following concerns that apply to most of the proposals:

- * It is unclear what measurable, concrete results will be accomplished at each site that will not just aid USDA, but will directly benefit citizens of the surrounding communities by the year's end. Every site should have community service objectives that are both meaningful and countable and that can be realistically accomplished in a year.
- * Objectives are identical for widely divergent locations in different states. It is impossible for all these communities to have identically the same needs, indicating to me that real and meaningful community service objectives have yet to be crafted for each individual site. Compare these objectives to the NRCS and RECD objectives, which are highly different at each and every site, and have usually been carefully drafted to meet each community's unique needs.
- * The accomplishments noted for most of these sites in the first quarter reports were notably weak and vague.
- * The proposals use many currently popular buzz words about rural development, such as "sustainable development," "empowerment," "developing leadership," "information superhighway, and "human dimensions," but often these terms are used generally instead of specially explaining what the Members will actually do for a year.

* Too many AmeriCorps Members are still proposed for office work similar to USDA office work, which would violate the National and Community Service's Act prohibition on duplicating the work of existing employees.

* Few of the sites have specific and comprehensive work plans explaining exactly how the AmeriCorps Members will achieve their community service objectives on a weekly and/or monthly basis.

Some specifics by sites:

Four Corners - The proposal lists a wide variety of projects --- ranging from promoting environmental justice to building a health clinic to increasing tourism --- and states that Members will "assist," "aid," "engage in," "explore opportunities," and "work with" these projects. Yet it is highly unclear from the proposal as to exactly what role AmeriCorps Members will play in those processes and exactly what measurable, quantify results the Members will achieve in each project. In addition, the hoped for result of the activities is also vague, such as "more community leaders," "more jobs," "increase in materials that will be recycled etc." How many leaders will be trained, how many jobs will be created, how many tons of solid waste will be recycled, etc?

West Virginia 1 - Computer Networking - I have concerns about the proposal's statement that one Member working on electronic communications has "been active supporting other AmeriCorps Members throughout West Virginia and Minnesota;" it is impermissible to use one AmeriCorps Members to spend the bulk of the service year proving support functions for other AmeriCorps Members. This should not be continued.

West Virginia 2 - Forest Products Conservation - This year the Member "engaged in the development of a survey" and identified training and technical assistance needs. Next year, the Member will develop training materials and "continue to make local industry aware of services." It sounds as if the Member was simply added as support staff for the Wood Technology Center, thereby violating the intent of AmeriCorps. How will this Member directly serve surrounding communities and what concrete, measurable results will be achieved?

West Virginia 3A - Resource Conservation Specialist - How many mill owners will the Member assist technically, how will they change their practices as a result, and how will this benefit the surrounding communities? Does this violate the provisions of the National and Community Service Act that bar Members from providing direct service to for-profit entities?

West Virginia 3 B - Community Development Specialist - How many residents will the Member assist technically, and how --- specifically and quantifiably --- will this benefit the surrounding communities?

Minnesota 1 - Alternative Agroforestry - What was the exact role of the AmeriCorps Member in planting the 1000 acres of hybrid poplar in 1994? Isn't soil mapping routine NRCS work? How many landowners will be educated and how many jobs will be created?

Minnesota 2A - Rural Economic Development - The Members will engage in a wide variety of tasks, but what specific objectives will be accomplished? Member should not spend a significant amount of time on public affairs activities like newsletter creation.

Minnesota 2B - Rural Tourism - The Members will engage in a wide variety of tasks working with outside groups and assisting different types of individuals, but what specific objectives will be accomplished? How will increases in tourism, jobs, and local income be measured?

Minnesota 3 - Sustainable Development - While the "background" section lists an impressive number of manufacturers, banks, and other institutions the Members will contact in 1995, it is unclear what specific results those contacts will have that benefit the surrounding communities. For 1996, the objectives are highly vague. Additionally, e plans to directly help manufacturers "have improved access to training, transfer capitol" etc. may violate the provisions of the National and Community Service Act that bar Members from providing direct service to for-profit entities.

Louisiana - 2 - Tourism development - How many more tourists will visit, how will they impact the local economy, and how, specifically, will this be accomplished?

Mississippi 4 - Recycling Technology - How exactly will these additional jobs be created? How many tons of waste will be recycled? What percentage reduction in landfill volume will occur?

Tennessee 1, 4 - Environmental Education - Why will the members only perform 15 presentations in an entire year? How will the impact be measured? What does a 15% in "increase in participation" mean?

Tennessee 3 - Solid waste management - **This site has one of the most specific objectives**, but I do have one technical question: In what entity will be recycling rate increase by 10%? (In a county, in a town, in a solid waste district?)

Virginia 1 - Timber bridges - How many bridges will actually be built as a result of the AmeriCorps service?

Kentucky 1, 3 and Mississippi 7,9, Arkansas 1,5, and Louisiana 4 - Economic development -- By definition, any set of objectives that would be supposedly exactly the same for seven different locations in four different states is overly vague and not very meaningful. For each site, we need to know how many new jobs and businesses will be created. We also need a better sense of the day-to-day work Members will be performing.

Arkansas 3 and Virginia 1 - Alternative wood products - How much will the value of local wood products be increased? How much higher will local employment and income levels be?

Virginia 4 - Rural tourism - This Member's work seems to be directed entirely at public relations work, which is unacceptable. The hoped for result is for local residents "to have a better understanding of tourism, the impact of tourism, and their individual role of tourism?" Why should the American taxpayers pay so people that tourism is important? Instead, the objectives should focus on creating local jobs and boosting local income through tourism.

North Carolina 1 - Five Year Community Plan - How will such a five year plan have any impact at all in the first year of AmeriCorps operation? Results must be immediate -- neither Congress nor the public will wait five years to determine whether taxpayer dollars are being spent on AmeriCorps? Moreover, what are the specifics of such a plan? The description is so vague that the eventual plan could cover virtually anything.

Georgia 1 - Tourism - This position seems dangerously close to work that would be normally performed by a Forest Service employee. The Member definitely should not help produce a video for use by the Forest Service nationally. How will recycling proposal be implemented?

These problems I have enumerated above are not, in my view, simply a result of poorly written proposals. They track with both the first quarter reports and with news we have heard from the field --- all of which indicate that many Forest Service Rural Development Team Members are engaged in activities that may not fully meet the AmeriCorps vision.

I fully expect that many project managers will respond to this memorandum simply by saying that those of us in Washington "don't understand rural development" --- that rural development projects take years to develop and cannot be measured numerically in the same way we can measure "widgets" such as the number of miles of trails we repaired on forests or the number of children we fed in soup kitchens. These are good points, but I respectfully disagree, for two reasons:

A) Rural Development Team projects sponsored by other USDA agencies, RECD and NRCS, have successfully developed quantifiable, measurable objectives about "widgets" they will produce through AmeriCorps. If some USDA agencies can produce such exact objectives, the FS sites should be able to do so as well. (Three examples are attached.)

B) Neither Congress, the media, nor the public will wait for years before determining whether to refund AmeriCorps. They demand concrete results for taxpayers immediately.

We have raised such issues in the past and, unfortunately, they have not been systematically addressed by Forest Service Rural Development project managers. All our managers need to understand that, if all these problems are not redressed an immediate and serious manner, neither USDA nor the Corporation for National and Community Service are likely to support their renewal.

However, I have full confidence that our staff and Members will make the needed changes, helping ensure that USDA will continue to have nothing but the highest quality AmeriCorps programs throughout the nation.

Thank you for your help.

March 9, 1995

To: Lou

From: Joel

9 pages, including this cover

Revised, final version.

April 21, 1995

To: Lloyd Wright
From: Joel Berg JB
Subject: Applications and Quarterly Reports Urgently Needed

As we discussed yesterday, and, as indicated by the attached two charts, my office has still not received the vast majority of information from NRCS necessary for us to complete both our quarterly report and our next year's application to the Corporation for National and Community Service.

As you know, because the Department faces a legal deadline for both projects of Monday, May 1 at 3:00 p.m., the quarterly reports were due to my office by April, 10 and the applications were due to my office by April 15.

Thus, if all the overdue NRCS materials are not provided to my office by COB today --- so I can review them over the weekend --- NRCS is in serious jeopardy of drastically reducing the size of its AmeriCorps program next year.

In addition, please review all materials carefully --- or ask your staff to do so -- before they are given to my office.

As we also discussed yesterday, many of the materials provided to me from NRCS have had minimal review by your office, resulting in serious lapses.

I will provide you with a comprehensive review of the materials I have received by COB today, but I can already give some examples of serious lapses:

1) Arizona Objective 1 states that the AmeriCorps members will spend a year simply creating a report, even though, as I have continually expressed to your office, it is against CNCS regulations for members to spend the bulk of their time conducting research and thus it is impermissible for members to spend their year creating such a report.

2) Arizona Objective 4 for Four Corners states that Members will spend the bulk of their year creating articles for newspapers, even though we have all previously agreed that members should not be spending the bulk of the year in public affairs activities.

3) Arkansas Objective 11 states that the Member in Little Rock will spend the year raising funds to create a foundation, even though the national and Community Service Act clearly prohibits members from spending their service year fundraising.

I stress that these are only some of the most egregious problems I have identified while still reviewing the applications starting with the letter "A."

These problems will require an extraordinary effort by many NRCS staff Members immediately in order to rectify them in time.

Please call me at 720-6350 if you would like to further discuss this matter.

CC: Tom Hebert, Paula Cole Jones

NRCS AMERICORPS 1996 PROJECTS

preliminary approval 4/7/95

ME	Water Quality, Riparian Zone Treatment Environmental Education Upper St. John Salmon Restoration Trail Restoration	Narrative		Objectives		Cover Page	
		P	E	P	E	P	E
		X		X	X		
MA	Rural Development (pending)	X		X			
MD/DC	Park & Recreation Enhancement Anacostia Watershed Restoration Environmental Education So. Maryland RC&D: Recycling Forest Conservation	X		X			
				X	X		
MI	Farm*A*Syst	X		X	X	X	X
MN	Twin Valley: Agassiz Recreation Trail (3) Thief River: Feedlot Pollution Prevention (2) St. Peter: Flood Restoration & Prevention (6) Warren: River Beautification & Flood Control (9)	X	X	X	X	X	X
MS	MS Tourism Adopt-A-Stream Livestock Waste Management Forest Product Development Rural Fire Protection Environmental Education			X	X		

NRCS AMERICORPS 1996 PROJECTS

preliminary approval 4/7/95

STATE	COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS	Narrative		Objectives		Cover Page	
		P	E	P	E	P	E
AR	Marion: Rural Water Lines Pine Bluff: Limited Resource Farmers Vegetable Coop Holly Grove: Flood Recovery Community Relocation Fargo: Integrated Farming Systems	X		X	X		
AZ 4 Corners	Natural Resource Based Industry Development Small Scale Agriculture Natural Resource Inventory Environmental Education	X		X	X		
CA	Watershed Enhancement/Salmon Restoration			X	X	X	X
FL	Dade Co & Duval Co: Mobile Irrigation Lab	X	X	X	X	X	X
GA	Atlanta: Urban Plant Materials Center Olympic Landscape Preparation Watershed Management	X		X	X	X	X
HI	Molokai & Lanai Islands: Ecosystem Management	X	X	X	X	X	X
ID	Home*A*Syst	X	X	X	X	X	X

* P= Paper Obtained
* E= Electronic Obtained

NRCS AMERICORPS 1996 PROJECTS

preliminary approval 4/7/95

		Narrative		Objectives		Cover Page		
		P	E	P	E	P	E	
IL	Chicago: Green Space Revitalization Building Improvement Community Center & Park Development Environmental Education	X						
	E. St. Louis: Abandoned Lot Restoration Environmental Education City Park Improvement T.R.E.E. USA 4 City Designation Timber Bridge Project							X
IA	Rotational Grazing Grassland Conservation Silos & Smokestacks Heritage Area	X			X	X		
KS	Shawnee Co: Aquatic Habitat & Riparian Restoration (5) Crawford Co: State Park Restoration (5) Hays: Big Creek Bank Stabilization & Riparian Improvement (2RD ft/16EC pt = 8EC ft)	X			X	X		
LA	Farm*A*Syst Dry Fire Hydrants Coastal Wetland Restoration	X	X		X	X	X	X

NRCS AMERICORPS 1996 PROJECTS

preliminary approval 4/7/95

MO	Farm*A*Syst	Narrative		Objectives		Cover Page	
		P X	E X	P X	E X	P	E
NE	10 member Rural Develoment Team (pending)	X		X			
NH	Rural Fire Protection Resource Revitalization	X		X	X		
NJ	Watershed Restoration	X		X			
NY	East Aurora: GIS Community Application Urban Resource Partnership (Pending)	X		X	X	X	X
NC	Trout Stream Renovation State Park Ecosystem Management/Learning Center Dry Fire Hydrants	X		X		X	X
ND	5 member team (pending)	X					
OH	Darby Creek Watershed (5) Scenic River T.R.E.E.S. Turn Key Program Conservation of Critical Areas Urban Ecosystem Awareness (15) (Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton/Cincinnati)	X	X	X	X	X	X

NRCS AMERICORPS 1996 PROJECTS

preliminary approval 4/7/95

		Narrative		Objectives		Cover Page	
		P	E	P	E	P	E
OK	Windbreak Restoration (20) Conservation Reserve Enhancement & Education (10)	P X	E X	P X	E X	P	E
OR	Portland: Mid Columbia Slough Restoration (20) Grants Pass RC&D: (Obj. need more specificity)	X X		? X			
SC	Newberry, Greenwood, Florence, Walterboro (5RD each) Grassland Conservation Environmental Education Community Emergency Assistance (911) Wildlife Habitat Improvement	X		X	X		
SD	15 member team (pending revisions)			X			
TN	15 member team			X	X		
TX	Galveston Bay: Coastal Wetland Protection	X		X			
VT	Dry Fire Hydrants Winooski River Project	X		X			

**UPDATE ON STATUS AMERICORPS/USDA 2ND QUARTER REPORTS
FROM NRE AGENCIES
DUE TO THE DEPARTMENT, MONDAY, APRIL 10**

All the Forest Service sites have submitted both paper and diskette versions of their reports on time.

Below are listed NRCS sites where both paper and electronic copies of their reports are still missing:

ENVIRONMENTAL
NRCS Oklahoma
NRCS Texas Coast
NRCS Atlanta
NRCS Boston
NRCS New Jersey
NRCS DC/Beltsville
NRCS Chicago
NRCS Portland Full-time
NRCS Portland Part-time
NRCS Goldendale, Washington
NRCS South. and Cent. Illinois
NRCS South Dakota
NRCS Nebraska
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
NRCS Maine
NRCS Vermont

ENVIRONMENTAL
NRCS Virginia
NRCS West Virginia
NRCS South Carolina
NRCS Mississippi
NRCS Arkansas
NRCS Louisiana
NRCS Ohio
NRCS New York
NRCS Minnesota
NRCS Arizona
NRCS Colorado/New Mexico
NRCS Utah
NRCS Oregon (Grant's Pass)
NRCS Washington
NRCS Iowa
NRCS Illinois
NRCS Wisconsin

Below are listed sites from which paper copy have been received, but electronic copies are still missing:

- NRCS Kansas
- NRCS Michigan
- NRCS North Dakota
- NRCS California

April 21, 1995

To: Lloyd, Paul, Dee

From: Joel

Subject: Comments on Applications and Objectives Already Provided to Me

Some of the objectives require simple clarification, but those marked with an asterisk (*) are so problematic as written that I will be unable include them in the Departmental application if not completely overhauled within days.

Arizona

* Objective 1 states that the AmeriCorps members will spend a year simply creating a report, even though, as I have continually expressed to your office, it is against CNCS regulations for members to spend the bulk of their time conducting research and thus it is impermissible for members to spend their year creating such a report.

Objective 2 is unclear as to whether 30 farmers will receive some benefit or whether 30 new producers will start farm operations.

* Objective 3 states that members will complete an inventory, but this is unacceptable unless it specifies how that inventory will be used to change actual conservation practices on the land.

* Objective 4 for Four Corners states that Members will spend the bulk of their year creating articles for newspapers, even though we have all previously agreed that members should not be spending the bulk of the year in public affairs activities.

Arkansas

Objectives 1-5 are fine.

Objective 6 indicates 24 Members will serve out of Fargo, a tiny town. Can Fargo really absorb 24 Members? Can this site successfully recruit a diverse mix of Members?

Objectives 7 and 8 are fine.

Objective 9 needs to be more specific on exactly how many tons of waste will be recycled.

* Objective 10 describes only training and demonstrations without explaining how will their impact upon conservation practices will actually be measured.

* Objective 11 states that the Member in Little Rock will spend the year raising funds to create a foundation, even though the national and Community Service Act clearly prohibits Members from spending their service year fundraising.

* Objective 12 is missing the entire objective.

* Objective 13 is fine.

* Objective 14 is missing the entire objective.

* Objectives 15 - 18 are fine.

California

Objectives 1-4 are fine.

* Objective 5 is vague about how the education program will be carried out, how many people will be reached, and how success will be judged. If this is really public affairs work, it is unacceptable.

Objectives 6 - 10 are fine.

Objective 11 is unclear about precisely who the 350 people are that will receive the benefit. Are they schoolchildren?

Objectives 12 - 16 are fine.

* The four objectives for Sierra and Coachella Valleys are unclear. How will the improved crop production and soil sustainability be measured? How much water will be saved. By how much will crop yields increase? How will an increase in "system uniformity" be measured? By what percentage will the decrease in sediment reduction be measured?

Florida

* Both applications state that Members will be used as "apprentice MIL technicians," giving the impression that they would illegally duplicate functions already performed. The applications makes it seems like the AmeriCorps members will be rotated equally with actual employees.

* Objective 1 is unclear about how the benefits of the education will be measured.

* Objective 2 is unclear about how much water will be saved each year.

* Objective 3 does not specific how much less landfill space will be filled and how much less fertilizer will be used.

* Objective 4 does not state how many trails will be built or how many miles of trails will be created.

Objective 5 is fine.

Objective 6 is unclear how the education activities are actually measured.

Objective 7 gives no specifics about how much water will be saved.

Objective 8 gives no specifics about how much oil will be recovered.

Objective 9 is fine.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of
Communications

Washington, D.C.
20250-1300

(File)

April 18, 1995

TO: Ellen Haas
Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition,
and Consumer Services

FROM: Joel Berg AB
Director of National Service

SUBJECT: Example of A Possible New FCS AmeriCorps Project

Attached for your information and consideration is a copy of the AmeriCorps proposal submitted to our office by the Oregon Food Bank. We thought you would appreciate the opportunity to see the high quality of the programs that are being proposed to perform meaningful anti-hunger work across the nation.

Last week we provided you with a decision memo regarding the future of the Food and Consumer Services' (FCS) continued involvement in the Department's version of this important Presidential initiative. The Oregon proposal is only one example of the type of good we can do should you decide to increase the FCS funding level beyond the level provided in Fiscal Year 1994-95.

We need your decision on this matter as soon as possible in order to complete the Departmental grant application by the Corporation's April 28 deadline. Please do not hesitate to call me, at 720-6350, if you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter in greater detail. I look forward to hearing from you very soon.

CC: William Ludwig



April 18, 1995

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. William D. Carlson, Acting Administrator
Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service *J B*

Subject: Participation in Joint CSREES/FSIS AmeriCorps Food Safety Project

SUMMARY

The purpose of this memorandum is to ask you to consider funding three Americorps Members to join with two AmeriCorps Members to be funded by the Food Safety and Inspection Service. These Members would support a food safety educational intervention that FSIS will be undertaking in New York State. This intervention will augment a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Study and outreach project to be carried out by the Centers for Disease Control.

Because it is necessary to have a minimum of five Americorps Members working on a team, FSIS would not be able to run this project without CSREES support. The cost for three Members supported by CSREES would be \$75,000 for FY 96.

BACKGROUND

The Centers for Disease Control is undertaking a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Study during 1995 to determine state-specific estimates for several high-risk behaviors. The study consists of a telephone survey of a sample of people in six states.

The Food Safety Module of this study will measure improper handling and improper preparation of food. A follow-up survey will take place in the same states during 1997. CDC has asked the Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Food and Drug Administration to develop a food safety education intervention program for 1996 in one or more of the participating states.

PROGRAM APPROACH

Due to financial constraints, FSIS decided to limit the proposed educational intervention to one state. New York was chosen as the site because it is closest to Washington, so FSIS staff could travel back and forth more economically, and because of the state's effective public health department system. An additional reason was the strong presence of the Extension Service in that state and the enthusiasm for the project expressed by extension service staff there in preliminary discussions about the project.

The educational intervention will take place through two major avenues ---the media and organizations. The media outreach will be managed to a great extent from Washington, D.C. with FSIS headquarters staff. Organizational outreach will take place in New York state through Americorps Members and FSIS staff in cooperation with the Extension Service.

As you may know, other USDA agencies have already played significant roles in funding and managing USDA AmeriCorps projects. For instance, this fiscal year, the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are spending about \$10 million each. Therefore, the request for \$75,000 from CSREES is minimal, especially since AmeriCorps is one of President Clinton's top initiatives. Given that FSIS seeks to build upon an already productive discussions with the Extension Service in New York, and given that food safety is one of your agencies priorities, I hope CSREES will be able to support this proposal.

Since the USDA AmeriCorps application for next year must be complete by next Friday, April 28, a positive response to this request would need to be made in the next few days.

If you have any questions about the project, please don't hesitate to contact me at 720-6350 or Marjorie Davidson at FSIS, 690-0351. I hope you will positively consider this request.

cc: Deputy Under Secretary Karl Stauber
Marjorie Davidson, FSIS



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of
Communications

(File)

Washington, D.C.
20250-1300

April 17, 1995

To: Maureen Kennedy, Administrator
Rural Housing and Community Development Service

Dayton Watkins, Administrator
Rural Business and Cooperative Development Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service JB

Subject: Resolving RECD AmeriCorps Application Issues This Week

I am writing to ask your help in immediately approving a process to submit a RECD AmeriCorps application, even though some funding and structural issues in that application may later need to be amended.

As you may know, the USDA Departmental AmeriCorps application is due to the Corporation for National and Community Service next Friday, April 28. Because our application will compete against applications from other Federal agencies, there is no legal way that the Corporation can give us an extension.

Because my office needs to review, edit, and re-format literally thousands of pages of application documents from all the USDA mission areas to include in this application, it is essential that I receive all the RECD site applications for next year by this Friday, April 21.

The RECD applications must be based upon three preliminary decisions by your agencies that must be made this week:

- 1) How much money will your agencies spend on AmeriCorps in FY96 --- and from which pots of money? Will it be from a program account or from S&E, which has the most legal flexibility?
- 2) How many AmeriCorps Members will your agency support? (I believe there is some confusion of whether RECD will be supporting 235 Members or 335 Members.)
- 3) Will all the Members be placed with EZ/EC organizations through RBCDS, or will some continue to serve through RHCDS?

Once these decisions are made, we need to immediately collect from the states the four basic components of each site application:

A) How many Members will be in each state?

B) Where will the Members be located and how will they fit within a cluster of no less than five Members placed who are placed within a fifty mile or one hour drive of a central meeting place?

C) Will the Members be placed with non-profit organizations and county governments, or with USDA offices?

D) What will be the specific, concrete, and measurable community service objectives for each site?

RBCDS has already sent a letter to all EZ/EC communities requesting such information. If RHCDS plans to play a significant role in AmeriCorps for next year, the agency needs to send such a letter to its state offices immediately.

I understand that the funding situation for next year is shifting rapidly and your agencies can not, for certain, determine exactly how AmeriCorps will be funded next year. I further understand that some of these decisions may be made by Under Secretary Dunn or by Secretary Glickman, who are now focused to a great degree on the Rural Conferences. However, if we wait until those decisions are fully finalized, it will be too late for AmeriCorps. That is why I am asking you to make joint, preliminary decisions that can be included in the application.

All communications with the field and with the Corporation for National and Community Service should be clear that our proposal is preliminary and will likely be amended as the funding situation becomes clearer.

Please call me at 720-6350 if you would like to discuss this situation further. In the meantime, I will continue to work with your staff on these matters.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of
Communications

Washington, D.C.
20250-1300

(F:18)

STAFF accolades

April 13, 1995

To: Jack Ward Thomas, Chief
USDA Forest Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service *JB*

Subject: The Excellent Work of Lou Woltering

I am writing to most highly praise the work of Lou Woltering, who has been coordinating the Forest Service AmeriCorps program over the last few months.

He has brought an incredible amount of professionalism, intelligence, and efficiency to every aspect of his work on behalf of the program. He has met extremely short deadlines on a consistent basis without any complaint at all. He has performed a magnificent job providing rapid, consistent, and informative guidance to your field structure. In short, he has not just talked about reinventing government -- he has made it happen.

I am particularly grateful that Lou has been so cooperative with both the Department and other USDA agencies. He has consistently bolstered the new "Team USDA" approach to collaborative, inter-agency efforts.

Lou --- along with many talented and dedicated Forest Service employees in the field --- is largely responsible for the fact that the AmeriCorps Public Lands Teams run by the Forest Service are the single best functioning portion of the entire USDA AmeriCorps program. The projects are getting things done advancing ecosystem management and reducing work backlogs, while promoting community, opportunity, and responsibility.


I is with a great deal of regret that I wish Lou the best of luck as he moves into a new position. I know he will continue to serve the Forest Service --- and the American people --- well.

CC: Under Secretary Lyons, Lou Woltering



April 13, 1995

To: Jack Ward Thomas, Chief
USDA Forest Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service 

Subject: The Important Contributions of Katherine Allen and Vertis Stovall

I am writing to extol the important contributions of Katherine Allen and Vertis Stovall, who played critical roles in the early planning for the Forest Service AmeriCorps projects.

Despite being hampered by great uncertainty over the AmeriCorps budgets and administrative procedures, Katherine and Vertis gathered and submitted most proposals from the field that resulted in the Forest Service's excellent projects on the ground today.

They demonstrated an impressive dedication to public service, a willingness to place the success of the overall program above their personal ambitions, and a serious commitment to working in cooperation with the Department and with other USDA agencies. Their work was critical in ensuring that the AmeriCorps Public Lands Teams run by the Forest Service are the single best functioning portion of the entire USDA AmeriCorps program.

Their advice and counsel provided vital assistance in ensuring that AmeriCorps not only advanced the human resources mission of the Forest service, but aided ecosystem management and met many other of the top priorities of the Forest Service.

Whether or not Katherine and Vertis work on AmeriCorps in some capacity in the future, I know they will continue to serve the Forest Service --- and the American people --- well.

CC: Under Secretary Lyons, Katherine Allen, Vertis Stovall



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

Memo from

April 12, 1995

To: Eli Segal
From: Joel Berg *JB*
Subject: Updating the Executive Order on Employee Volunteerism

I understand that you are considering ways for the President to update President Bush's executive order on employee volunteerism. Such an update could significantly boost our AmeriCorps efforts by easing the ability of federal employees to help.

Some ideas:

- 1) **Designate a national day of employee volunteerism.** This should be on a weekend -- otherwise, if federal employees get leave time to volunteer during a workday, this will only dilute the message of sacrifice and fuel citizen resentment against us "overpaid bureaucrats."
- 2) **Coordinate federal employees participating in Nickelodeon's day of service as part of their new "Big Help" campaign.** As you know, the Nickelodeon cable network will sponsor one day in October or November during which children will volunteer in their communities. USDA, through Extension Service and other offices, is planning to help coordinate some activities on that day nationwide. The executive order should allow federal employees and federal offices to be used to coordinate these activities and serve as meeting centers.
- 3) **Ask federal agencies to have their field offices "adopt" AmeriCorps projects.** In the same way that federal offices in Washington now participate in Adopt-A-School programs in which employees tutor and mentor DC public school students, federal employees across the country could adopt AmeriCorps pilot projects and mentor the local participants.
- 4) **Require each Cabinet Secretary to designate one full-time employee as a volunteerism coordinator.** USDA does not currently have such a position, yet at least one such full-time position is really needed for Departments to have effective programs.
- 5) **Exempt certain volunteer programs from the Combined Federal Campaign's monopoly on employee fundraising.** Currently, Office of Personnel Management regulations stipulate that no program can raise funds from federal employees outside the Combined Federal Campaign. The President could ask OPM to exempt AmeriCorps, Adopt-a-School, and other special programs from this stipulation so that federal employees can contribute money to programs their agencies are running.



(FILE)

April 12, 1995

To: Patricia Jensen, Acting Assistant Secretary
Marketing and Regulatory Programs

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service *JB*

Subject: Continued Assistance for USDA AmeriCorps Projects

First, I would like to thank you for your support of the Department's AmeriCorps program during Fiscal Year 1995. AMS' support in our first year of operation --- providing funding to allow AmeriCorps members to help promote farmer's markets --- has been vital to the outstanding successes our five AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger projects have achieved. As you may already know, we are in the process of developing our plans for the second year of USDA's AmeriCorps projects.

AMS contributed \$20,000 in Fiscal Year 1994 funds to USDA's National Service effort for the current year, almost all of which went directly to the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Community Service Corps (MCSC) in support of an urban gardening/community market project that comprises a significant part of their AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger, Nutrition, and Empowerment program. The success of MCSC's project has been very inspirational to the other 4 anti-hunger sites (in Vermont, D.C., Mississippi, and Los Angeles) because all of them have similar efforts underway.

In the early part of Fiscal Year 1995, Carole Powell of your staff indicated that additional funds were likely to be available to support those elements of USDA's AmeriCorps anti-hunger programs that were directly related to the mission and purposes of your agency. Although those funds did not materialize in October, we would very much like to encourage your continued involvement in AmeriCorps/USDA. This year, we are asking your agency for \$100,000 to support market development initiatives that would be implemented by USDA-sponsored AmeriCorps teams in all of the current projects as well as (hopefully) one or two new projects in underserved areas of the country. FY 1995 funds can be used in our second year of operations because the AmeriCorps program year actually begins in September; obviously, FY 1996 monies could be committed this spring (for our application renewal purposes) and then allocated after October 1.

In addition, I would appreciate it if you could determine whether APHIS might also be able to provide limited financial support for AmeriCorps. FSIS is currently investigating whether they can fund a small AmeriCorps food safety project; a partnership with APHIS would allow AmeriCorps to expand upon the Administration's farm-to-table approach to food safety that you have personally done so much to advance. A \$50,000 contribution from APHIS would allow us to fund such a project.

We realize that these are trying times for all of USDA's agencies, but we are also convinced that AmeriCorps continues to be a wise investment in terms of the gains that are ultimately realized for all our agencies. As a point of reference, other agencies are contributing over \$25 million, including about \$10 million each from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Forest Service.

Given that, in the past few weeks, President Clinton has consistently reinforced his belief that AmeriCorps is a vital centerpiece of his Presidency, I hope we can count on your continued or expanded support for this critical initiative.

If you or your staff need additional information, Donna Hines (the Anti-Hunger Program Coordinator) and I will be happy to discuss your agencies involvement in greater detail at your convenience. You can reach Donna at 690-0693; my number is 720-6350. We look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

cc: Lon Hatamiya, Lonnie King

April 12, 1995

To: Lloyd Wright, Paula Cole Jones
From: Joel Berg JB
Subject: Urban Resources Partnership Application for New York

The application from New York looks very promising, but unfortunately, for both legal and policy reasons, we are unable to grant the request of the City Volunteer Corps (CVC) that we pay our Members stipends that are less than \$7,600 yearly.

It is true that CVC has an exemption *for itself* that allows CVC to pay less than the \$7,600, because CVC was a grantee of the previously existing Commission on National and Community Service. This exemption is based on the National and Community Service Act of 1993, Sec. 140 (a) 6, which states that the minimum stipend requirement "shall not apply to any program that was in existence on the date of enactment of the National and Community Service Act of 1993." Since CVC had a program on that date, it was eligible for the exemption. However, since USDA had no program at that date, USDA is not eligible for an exemption. Thus, if NRCS directly payrolls the Members --- as suggested in the revised proposal --- we can not legally pay a lower stipend.

Furthermore, from a policy standpoint, I believe all of us at USDA are reluctant to allow some Members of our environmental teams to earn less than other Members of our environmental teams nationally who are performing similar service. Precisely because CVC does not want some of their Members to be earning different benefits than other of their Members, that organization should understand why we do not want some of our Members to be earning less than some of our other Members.

Despite this roadblock over compensation, I hope we can still work out a mutually agreeable arrangement in New York. Let me know if there is any way my office can help.

Proposed Role of NRCS

We are able to revise our application so that NRCS has direct control over the granted funds – living allowances and associated funds for benefits and program support will go directly to, and will be managed by the NRCS State office. In addition, Jack Bricker, the NRCS Urban Programs Manager for NYC (and URP Steering Committee member) would be responsible for managing the program and supervising the Corps members' activities.

Jack would approve the Corps members time sheets, and would supervise the two full-time crew leaders. He would work with CVC planners to establish project rotations, would conduct weekly site visits, and would participate in bi-weekly in-service training programs and de-briefings. Jack would also coordinate the technical and educational project assistance from the other URP Federal partners.

Proposed Role of URP

Along with Jack and the CVC, URP will play an active role in soliciting and selecting appropriate field projects within the two targeted ecosystems. During the implementation phase, staff from the Federal agencies that comprise URP will be actively involved as technical consultants to the projects, and will provide environmental training and education for Corps members.

URP FY 95 project funds have been earmarked to provide additional program support, including grants to community project sponsors to cover materials and related project expenses, funds to hire the two crew leaders, and to provide limited support to CVC, matched by their City funding, to enable them to provide project support, as described below.

Proposed Role of CVC

We believe that there are many synergies to be gained from working with the CVC, including our ability to more efficiently administer the program by leveraging their existing structure, as well as in increasing the probability of success and long term sustainability. In addition, through association with URP, CVC will be empowered to conduct future environmental service programs independently.

URP plans to provide matching support to CVC to enable them to assist in Corps member recruitment/applicant screening, team-building/in-service training, and project planning. In addition, CVC will assist in training and supervising the two crew leaders.

Corps Members' Living Allowance

While we fully recognize that the URP Corps members' living allowances will be paid directly by NRCS, and Corps members will be identified as the NRCS/URP Americorps teams, CVC will continue to play an active role as a local partner, as described above. We therefore continue to request a special allowance to compensate our Corps members at a lower rate than the NRCS standard living allowance of \$169.20 per week, in order to be consistent with the CVC stipend of \$101.50 per week. The National Service legislation allows organizations that pre-dated the AmeriCorps program, such as CVC, to compensate their Corps members at a lower rate.

In order to maximize the extent to which we can leverage pre-existing elements of CVC's program, the URP Corps members would interact with CVC Corps members on repeated occasions. It is critical that our Corps members be integrated in a way that is non-disruptive to the fabric of CVC's program. Currently, CVC feels strongly that they cannot allow the URP Corps members to interact with the CVC Corps members if there is a differential in the level of compensation.



(File)

April 11, 1996

To: Tom Hebert
From: Joel Berg JB
Subject: Background Documents for Our Meeting

I look forward to meeting with you on Thursday to discuss media and other issues regarding the NRCS AmeriCorps program. As background to that meeting, you may want to review the attached, numbered, sets of documents.

1) A note from Rick Allen, a Deputy Assistant to the President for National Service (who is Eli Segal's Deputy) pointing out problems in an article that was generated by an agency press release that was never sent to my office for review. Rick specifically requesting my help in ensuring that our "field PR folks" correctly explain AmeriCorps.

2) A set of documents demonstrating the effectiveness and success of the regional facilitators. Contrary to what you may have been told, every USDA agency other than NRCS --- including the Forest Service -- supports the existence of the facilitators. Also despite what you may have been told, many NRCS AmeriCorps Project Managers, and even a few State Conservationists, strongly support the facilitators.

Please note the letter from James Habinger, the State Conservationist from Kansas, stating that "Your help in recruiting and arranging details for initial program implementation has been invaluable. In fact, we could not have done it without you."

Also please note the letter signed jointly by myself and Meg Maguire of the Corporation for National and Community Service outlining joint activities for the facilitators and the Corporation's state directors. Also attached are the two pages from the USDA AmeriCorps manual -- which were approved by and subsequently printed by NRCS -- which specifically provide a flow chart and narrative representing the duties of the facilitators. Please also note my November 29, 1994 memo --- which was also approved by NRCS --- further clarifying the duties of the facilitators. Lastly, I have attached the latest set of reports from our facilitators --- which I share with NRCS and every other interested agency every week --- so you can judge for yourself whether they provide useful information.

I understand that you have been presented with a decision memorandum on the issue of the facilitators --- which was presented to you before I had a chance to review it. The memorandum incorrectly asserts that the Forest Service opposes the facilitators. The memorandum also falsely implies that the facilitator reports are secret reports given only to me; that is totally false --- I provide copies of the reports each week to Lloyd Wright. In addition, the memorandum incorrectly states that the facilitators are full-time jobs costing the taxpayers over a million dollars. In fact, only a very few of the facilitators are working on AmeriCorps full-time --- most only spent between 5-35% of their time on the issue; therefore, the true cost to taxpayers is a few hundred thousand dollars. While NRCS has roughly almost half of the Department's AmeriCorps slots this year, it will have only between 32% - 38% of the over allotment next year; therefore, it makes no sense at all for NRCS, on its own, to make structural decisions about the entire Departmental program. Most importantly, it is totally inappropriate to ask Under Secretary Lyons to make a unilateral determination over employees who work for Under Secretary Moos, and who affect AmeriCorps Members serving agencies of three other Under Secretaries. This is more appropriately a decision for us to make together jointly or to be made by Secretary Glickman. I urge Under Secretary Lyons not to sign it until we have had a chance to fully discuss this issue.

3) A series of documents specifying serious, systematic --- and often uncorrected problems --- with NRCS AmeriCorps projects. Such problems include: projects started without the proper tools, Members not having enough work to perform on a daily basis, projects without the socio-economic diversity required by the law and expected by the President, projects that may have illegally displaced paid employees, projects that may have illegally duplicated the work of existing staff, projects that have unclear or improper community service objectives, projects in which the Members are not adequately supervised, and projects that have spent virtually all their time in training instead of actual community service.

In one case, Senator Daschle --- one of the country's most committed and most important defenders of AmeriCorps --- asked his state director to call me personally to complain that the NRCS Members in South Dakota were performing routine NRCS office work in violation of the law; according to the State Director, Daschle said: "That's not the AmeriCorps program I voted for." In addition, Eli Segal and his staff have raised strong concerns about some of these problems.

I have not raised these issues with you or Under Secretary Lyons in the past because I have continually made a good faith effort to work with NRCS staff to fix these problems. However, it is my understanding that some in NRCS are now somehow blaming my office or the facilitators for these problems, so I believe it is important to set the record straight.

In the months in which the Corporation for National and Community Service and myself have been asking NRCS staff to help correct these serious problems, some NRCS staff have tended to "blame the messenger" instead of taking concrete steps to fix the problems.

4) A memorandum I recently sent to Chief Johnson outlining ways to address these challenges. As you know, Chief Johnson is a fervent and effective champion of AmeriCorps. In almost all instances he and I agree on the direction of NRCS AmeriCorps projects. The Department's policies regarding the media and the regional facilitators seem to be issues pushed by some on his staff, but, in our numerous conversations, the Chief has never once raised any concerns regarding either of those issues. Chief Johnson, Under Secretary Lyons, and yourself have provided invaluable aid in ensuring that the USDA AmeriCorps program is not only the largest in the nation, but fully meets the vision of the President. Working together, we can ensure that continues.

I hate to again bury you in paper, but I believe all parties involved need to make our judgments about the USDA AmeriCorps program based on documented facts, not upon conflicting personalities.

As always, I seek not to debate who is at fault for problems, but seek to agree upon constructive ways to address those problems. I hope this information provides helpful background for our meeting on Thursday.

April 10, 1995

To: Lloyd, Paula

From: Joel



8 pages, including this cover

For your information, attached is a special mid-year report prepared by our Illinois Facilitator. As we have come to expect, it has good news and bad news.

The good news is that the Pittsfield-area project seems to be going exceptionally well. The facilitator describes it as a "model" project.

The bad news is that the East St. Louis project still seems to have significant problems. The Members apparently spent the entire Winter in training, exceeding the 20% limit on training. They have completed very little actual conservation work in the community. There also seems to be a lack of clarity over whether NRCS or the community college are "in charge." These observations of the facilitator track very closely to your first quarter report, my site visit, and media accounts.

As we agreed during on our recent discussions, this is an instance where my office will back off and give a NRCS chance to resolve these problems at the state and local level. I hope your Illinois Project Director will be empowered to take the actions necessary.

Thank you for your help.

AMERICORPS / CFSA USDA *****

ROD ATTERBERRY
ILLINOIS AMERICORPS FACILITATOR
P. O. BOX 107
HAVANA, IL 62644-0107

OFFICE PHONE: 309-543-2582
FAX NO. 309-543-3154

Joel Berg

April 10, 1995

Joel

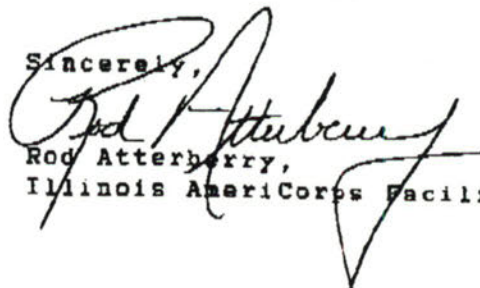
This report is intended to bring you up-to-date on the Illinois U.S.D.A. AmeriCorps projects. As you will notice the East St. Louis project has some problems that have not been mentioned in previous reports. There are two reasons for this. 1.) I am a person that likes to solve a problem and then report it and the solution. 2.) As I was working with new people on a new project I felt that reporting problems was a good way to be excluded from the team.

Neither of the above excuses have worked as well as I planned. I apologize for not reporting these problems as they came to my attention.

On March 23, 1995, I met with the head of the AmeriCorps project at State Community College in East St. Louis. I was under the misconception that he was no longer involved with this project and therefore had not discussed any problems with him. It was a very productive meeting with him promising quick action on the problems outlined. I will have to wait and see if the promised changes take place. The East St. Louis project has been covered by locally produced "smoke screen" that makes it very hard to separate fact from fiction.

I have enjoyed my role as a facilitator and feel that this position is one of importance. I look forward to my next six months with AmeriCorps.

Sincerely,



Rod Atterberry,
Illinois AmeriCorps Facilitator

Six Month AmeriCorps Facilitator Report

Two Rivers Area Rural Development and Public Lands/Environment Teams Project

Problems Encountered:

Recruiting

AmeriCorps pay (which cannot change) was not high enough to compete with other jobs in this rural area. Members can receive higher pay working with farmers, fast food franchises, or other types of employment. This resulted in 1.) Not receiving the quantity of qualified applicants to choose from 2.) Not being able to get quality applicants to accept the positions.

Another problem was the distance that members have had to travel to report to work in this 5 county area.

The above problems mainly affect the Public Lands/Environmental Team members. The higher pay and set work areas of the Rural Development Team has taken care of these problems.

Positive Results

Overall I feel that this project is a "model project". The members have worked everyday regardless of weather. The projects have covered the entire 5 county area with a wide variety of community services performed. The project manager has had to put job requests on waiting lists or turn them down. Every project sponsor has had nothing but praise and thanks for the assistance and the conduct of the members.

The training provided has been diverse and covered topics that can be used in everyday life.

East St. Louis/Metro Area Public Lands

Problems Encountered:

Command Structure

The term "too many chiefs" comes to mind. This project had the following persons involved; project manager, State Community College, NRCS Advisor to project (both running the project).

I have pointed out that only one boss was needed and any others should have their roles defined. The boss problem still hasn't been completely resolved.

Winter Projects

Members were not assigned community service projects during winter months. I raised this point but nothing was done. This has hurt the public awareness of AmeriCorps in this area.

I know indoor projects could have been found if contacts would have been made. The 2 other Illinois U.S.D.A. projects worked every day.

I have discussed this concern with the project manager and NRCS State Office.

Training

It is my opinion which I pointed out to the project manager that the members were spending too much time in training. They were not to receive college training on computers and landscaping. I stated that a maximum of 20% of the time was to be spent on training. The problem was not resolved to my satisfaction, but was assured that this project intends to adhere to this requirement.

Project Selection and Completion

None of the environmental or flood team projects have been completed. I feel this is for two reasons. The first being, all projects selected were outdoors and the second, projects selected all depended on the use of heavy equipment which is not available on a day to day basis.

The flood projects have been tied up due to discussions with citizens, city governments, county government, and the various departments.

I should point out that the project is on schedule with the goals of the application. Care should be taken at CNCS that the goals or work projects are not only warm weather projects.

Problems Between Facilitator and On-Site Project Personnel

Several times I have called and left a message which has not been returned. Information which they had been requested but not provided (ie. member applications, first quarter report, member

Overall problems encountered at one or both projects.

Uniforms

All members received T-shirts and buttons. Thirty hats have been ordered several times but have not been received. Fifteen members out of 45 have hats. Sweat shirts were received in mid-March. Better late than never. I suggest that each member be furnished at least 2 T-shirts. This would allow members to always wear a clean uniform.

Signs

AmeriCorps projects are not being recognized because signs are not available. Each project should have a sign at each work place. Lack of uniforms and signs has kept AmeriCorps out of the public eye. We are wasting valuable public relations benefits.

Child Care

Problems were encountered at first but we were able to work them out by contacting AmeriCorpsCare. My biggest problem was getting through to AmeriCorpsCare.

Training

The Two Rivers project was not linked with any group or facility that could provide training. The project managers major involvement and time consuming duties were the day to day work scheduling, lining up sponsors and equipment, plus the supervising of the members which did not allow time for training activities. I, therefore, assumed the duties of overseeing the training.

My major problems with training were two-fold. The first was the NRCS state training officer did not get involved or provide any training. The second was national assistance was not available.

The training problems were solved by recruiting the assistance of a Cooperative Extension Service employee. I am forwarding, under separate cover, a brief description and members evaluations of the training provided. My hope is a training guideline with topics and assistance contacts will be developed for future use.

I recommend that CES become involved with the training. They have in place programs, instructors, and contacts with colleges and universities.

Workman's Compensation

Proper procedure on recording paying injured members was not provided.

handbook). The member handbook was prepared locally but I, as an AmeriCorps representative, have not been given access to a copy.

As a facilitator I felt one of my duties was to arrange interaction between the two groups. I scheduled two training sessions involving all members from both projects. The first session was E.E.O./Civil Rights/Sexual Harassment. Only 16 of 28 members from East St. Louis attended. The excuse given for those absent was they had children and could not attend. The second session was Conflict Resolution with CES instructing the class. Funds had been obtained to pay for the training instructors for a group of 45 participants. Zero members from East St. Louis attended. I was not informed of their decision not to attend, even though I had requested a count of those attending. My SED attended some of this training and was expecting both groups.

Team U.S.D.A.

Despite repeated discussions and attempts I have not been able to become a contributing member of the East St. Louis Project.

Positive Results

The Ecosystem Council which is composed of representatives of education personnel, the county police, U.S.D.A. city and other government agencies, citizen groups plus private citizens has supported and involved themselves with AmeriCorps.

The State Community College has provided facilities, equipment, and training for AmeriCorps.

The members will leave AmeriCorps service with extensive training and experience which will allow them to compete in the job market.

The East St. Louis members are motivated and proud of what they are doing.

Transportation

Neither of the sites had adequate transportation at the start. This was solved 2 ways. One was NRCS transferring vehicles to the sites (I found out some were to be sold and notified NRCS State Office that they were needed at projects) and the second was I contacted National Guard units and had vehicles transferred to NRCS.

Communication

Project managers and facilitators need to be better informed on all aspects of AmeriCorps. The flow of information from national to state to project managers and facilitators was poor to nonexistent.

Support

I feel that the support for AmeriCorps at the national level of CFSA and NRCS is lacking. I hope this improves.

State Commission Executive Director

Communication between myself and this office has been poor. They have furnished brief information when requested but have not been available for general AmeriCorps discussion. At the only face-to-face meeting with this person I was told they were understaffed and would not have time to work with U.S.D.A. I have not been notified of any training or special interest events.

Cooperation for National and Community Service

I contacted the State Program Director after returning from Washington D.C. and introduced myself. I have not been contacted since.

Other

I have observed that AmeriCorps projects are addressed as NRCS AmeriCorps instead of Team U.S.D.A. AmeriCorps.

Facilitator Position

This position has proven to be one of importance. As a facilitator I have spotted problems and offered solutions to persons involved. I have coordinated training and group interactions and been able to research and solve problems that members have brought to me.

I would like to see facilitators given a more clear-cut mission statement.

Facilitators need some authority to redirect or resolve problems. We have to rely on personnel in the sponsoring agency to correct problems.

As a facilitator I would urge you to have another training session or conference. The benefits of reestablishing goals and direction plus the exchange of ideas would far outweigh the costs.



April 10, 1995

To: Ellen Haas, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition,
and Consumer Services

From: Joel Berg *JB*
Director of National Service

Subject: AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger Event in Oregon April 25

As you may know, April 25th will be celebrated around the country as a National Day of Service. Over two million people and more than 2,000 service programs across the country will participate in special service-related events that day, to call attention to the valuable services performed on a daily basis by AmeriCorps members, community service workers, and volunteers. Needless to say, the five AmeriCorps/USDA anti-hunger projects will be participating in this observance, largely in conjunction with other activities that are underway in their respective areas.

However, the purpose of this memo is to bring to your attention an interesting group of events scheduled in the State of Oregon to recognize the National Day of Service. The Oregon Commission for National and Community Service has formed a coalition with 15 other agencies across the state, and this coalition has decided to focus all of its service efforts that day on anti-hunger activities. "Because No One Should Be Hungry" is their promotion theme, and all the activities will focus on the alleviation of hunger in Oregon communities. Some of the activities planned for the National Day of Service include:

- * Raising produce, through a Cooperative Youth Garden Project, that will then be distributed through local food banks to low-income families;
- * Implementing a special anti-hunger nutrition project involving at-risk teens;
- * Providing table service in, and physical labor to repair/rebuild the storage areas of, the Sisters of the Road Cafe. You may remember that Sisters of the Road is a non-profit restaurant serving the hungry

and homeless in Portland; the organization was one of FCS' first Homeless Assistance grantees, selected to enhance access to food stamps and other food assistance benefits for homeless individuals and households under the provisions of the Mickey Leland Hunger Act.

- * Building, preparing, and planting community gardens at selected school sites;
- * Developing an anti-hunger curriculum called "Children Feeding Children" in the Lincoln County School System;
- * Participating in food drives to supplement resources available to local food banks.

As you can see, these activities are all closely related to the types of service generally provided by the FCS food assistance programs. The Oregon State Commission has been working closely with Senator Hatfield's office and staff, as well as the staffs from their Congressional delegations, all of whom have been extremely supportive in promoting anti-hunger and nutrition efforts in their State.

This would be an excellent opportunity to craft a media event for you that would highlight the importance of both Federal nutrition programs and AmeriCorps. Such an event is particularly relevant in the home state of the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

You are cordially invited to attend any of them that may pique your interest, although I would recommend an event in or around Portland. Please let us know if you plan to join in any of the Oregon activities. If you are unable to travel to Oregon on April 25th, your endorsement of this concentrated anti-hunger initiative would be greatly appreciated. We will provide you with more specific information on the observance of the National Day of Service at our five USDA Anti-Hunger project sites as soon as it becomes available to us. If you have any questions or would like to have additional information about the National Day of Service, please do not hesitate to contact me, at 720-6350, or Donna Hines, FCS liaison and AmeriCorps/USDA's Anti-Hunger Project Coordinator, at 690-0693.



April 7, 1995

To: Paul Johnson, Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service *JB*

Subject: Suggested Joint Actions to Improve AmeriCorps Projects

I am extremely pleased to report that the NRCS AmeriCorps sites I just visited in both Tennessee and Louisiana are impressive successes that are meeting both the mission of NRCS and the vision of AmeriCorps. The Members and staff are able to demonstrate measurable, concrete accomplishments in meeting critical community needs.

I met with Members in those states who are pumping out waste lagoons for local farmers, building trails at a nature center, providing environmental education to school-children, conducting water quality surveys for farmers, promoting tourism, and increasing dry fire hydrants. I also met with local volunteer fire officials and local mayors who were highly enthusiastic in their praise for the program. I have already reported these stunning successes to the Corporation for National Service. Additionally, after meeting with you, Eli Segal's staff understood more fully that many of our best successes are a direct result of your incredible --- almost evangelical --- personal support for AmeriCorps.

However, my visits to other states in the Delta region indicated that success has still not been achieved equally by all our sites. Thus, following-up on extremely helpful conversations I have had recently with yourself and Lloyd Wright, and as well as your meeting with Meg Maguire of the Corporation, permit me to suggest a few steps we can all take rapidly to further improve our projects:

Suggested Actions by NRCS

1) Request that a trained mediator with experience in managing volunteers travel to certain problematic urban environmental sites in Boston, New Jersey, DC, Atlanta, East St. Louis, and Chicago and spend at least a week at each site mediating problems. I am excited to learn that your wife will be visiting many of our sites; perhaps she can offer some of the needed support.

2) Have specific conversations with state conservationists in Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Kansas about immediately redefining the work of Members who may have been completing wetlands delineations and also reducing the amount of time other Members in their states are performing other routine NRCS work. Perhaps you could request that all these Members be switched to environmental education work; this could be completed with virtually no new funding or training. I would suggest that you share with these states the outstanding environmental education curriculum materials developed in Tennessee. Perhaps you could also ask these states to provide some direct physical service, such as organizing days in which all their Members would work together to physically clean-up areas still damaged from the 1993 floods.

3) Bring top-level focus to National day of Service, April 25th. Plan to visit a site and strongly encourage your AmeriCorps projects nationally to engage in activities that recruit community volunteers to serve side-by-side for the day with our AmeriCorps Members. (See attached memorandum.)

4) Ask your staff to include the Departmental media policy and guidelines on AmeriCorps --- already approved by all other USDA agencies ---- in the revised Departmental operations manual being prepared by your staff. This document (attached) includes key talking points for communicating about the program. I will also work with Dave White to implement a comprehensive media plan for NRCS.

5) Immediately determine the number of Members, the budget, and the management structure for next year's program. I would highly encourage including some funds for actual project work in each project's budget. As both myself and Meg Maguire have stated, we would prefer a modest increase in which all our Members have adequate budget and support, rather than a large increase which we could not properly manage.

6) Hold a conference call or calls with all applicants for next year --- including project managers, state conservationists, and regional conservationists ---- to explain our shared vision for AmeriCorps and to answer questions. Perhaps this could be accomplished with one call to each region.

7) Ensure that applications for next year are reviewed immediately by both myself and decision makers in your agency. I am working with Paula to obtain all these applications of diskettes in Wordperfect 5.1. Any changes that are made by any of the reviewers should be agreed to jointly by myself, your staff, each relevant state conservationist, and the local project managers before inclusion in our Departmental application (which is due April 28).

8) At your convenience, I would suggest that you and I jointly brief the Washington representatives of key interest groups --- such as the Soil and Water Conservation Society, the National Farmer's Union, the Clean Water Action, etc.

9) Ensure that all key information about the program is distributed uniformly to all your state contacts and project managers. Months ago, I agreed to that I would ensure that your staff had an opportunity to review any materials before distribution to the field. I have done so, but unfortunately many key documents produced by myself or the Corporation have never been received by many of your state contacts, and have been received even less frequently by your local project managers. This complaint has been echoed to me repeatedly by NRCS staff in every region of the country. To some degree, this problem is a function of the reality that the NRCS computer system is not nearly as integrated at the FS computer system. I would suggest that you instruct your OIRM staff to make it a priority to place all your actual project sites on one e-mail system, computer bulletin board, or speed fax system. In the meantime, I will work with your staff to ensure complete distribution of all key documents.

Suggested Actions by My Office

1) Give NRCS the assurance that both myself and the Corporation will empower your state offices to first attempt to solve problems on the local level before the issue is even raised with us. Lloyd Wright and I recently discussed this issue at length. We agreed that he would provide me with an updated list of contacts in your state offices and encourage Corporation for National and Community Service state representatives to work with them directly in problem-solving. By asking the Corporation to focus on first attempting to solve all problems on the local level, we hopefully solve the problems more quickly while reducing the duplication that results from involving Washington in local problems.

2) Work to set-up a meeting as soon as possible between you and Eli Segal.

3) Continue to encourage Eli Segal and Secretary Glickman to visit some of the most successful NRCS sites. (Segal has already met with NRCS AmeriCorps members in Vermont and Iowa.) I will also attempt to get the President or Vice-President, as well as key Members of Congress, to visit one of our sites or to participate in a national teleconference with all our Members nationwide.

4) Per your request, I will raise with the Corporation, as well as with other USDA agencies, the possibility of lowering the stipend for our future Rural Development Team Members.

All the above-suggested actions could be completed quickly -- and with a minimal commitment of new resources or time. Yet those small steps could go a long way towards significantly improving our program. I thank you again for your extraordinary commitment to this program.

CC: Lloyd Wright, Paula Cole Jones, Dee DeFiore



UNITED
STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

March 9, 1995

To: USDA AmeriCorps Project Managers and Facilitators
From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service *JB*
Subject: Activities on April 25, the "National Day of Service"

As part of National Volunteer Week, the Corporation for National and Community Service, Youth Service America, and the Points of Light Foundation are jointly sponsoring a "National Day of Service" on April 25, 1995.

We hope that all USDA AmeriCorps sites will be able to take leadership roles on that day by planning events that will **recruit local community volunteers** to serve side-by-side with our AmeriCorps Members on large-scale community service projects. Such signature projects --- meeting unmet environmental, human, public safety, or educational needs --- could occur before most local residents go to work, during the lunch hour, after normal working hours, and/or throughout the day.

Wherever possible, try to plan activities that bring together USDA AmeriCorps Members sponsored by different USDA agencies. Additionally, please attempt to team-up with non-USDA AmeriCorps programs in your area. Please coordinate with your state commission on national and community service before you finalize your plans. Please also consider inviting notable local leaders, including business executives, non-profit organization heads, educational officials, celebrities, religious leaders, and elected officials, including congresspeople, senators, and governors.

As soon as you have finalized your plans for April 25, please fax us the attached form at (202) 720-4614, so we will be able to include your information in a Departmental press release we will be distributing to the national media. Please try to respond by April 10, 1995.

If you have any questions about this day, please contact your agency AmeriCorps coordinator or me directly at (202) 720-6350.

I thank you in advance for your help in ensuring that USDA AmeriCorps projects play a significant role in the "National Day of Service."

**USDA/AMERICORPS
NATIONAL DAY OF SERVICE RESPONSE FORM**

Location and state where National Day of Service project will be performed:

USDA agency or agencies from which AmeriCorps Members will be participating:

Number of USDA AmeriCorps Members expected to participate: _____

Counties of the duty stations of USDA AmeriCorps Members expected to participate:

Name of any non-USDA AmeriCorps projects expected to participate: _____

Estimated number of community volunteers also expected to participate: _____

Any local leaders confirmed to attend: _____

Brief description of the type of service to be performed: _____

Name and number of contact person for day's project: _____

Please fax to (202) 720-4614 when complete.

Call (202) 720-6350 with any questions.

Chapter Ten
National Media and Communications 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. The media policy is a reflection of a Departmental public affairs program to educate the public through a proactive strategy to get positive print and broadcast coverage for all the AmeriCorps/USDA projects.

Specifically:

- 1) AmeriCorps/USDA is a Departmental initiative and any press releases --- even at a local level --- must be approved at the Department level by either Joel Berg (phone # 202-720-6350) or Katherine Gibney (phone # 202-720-4369) in Washington, D.C., before submission to the press. Fax all drafts to 202-720-4614. A 24-HOUR TURNAROUND FOR APPROVAL OR COMMENTS IS PROMISED.

- 2) If any reporters from the national media (such as NBC,CBS,ABC,CNN, New York Times, Washington Post, Kansas City Star, Chicago tribune, LA Times, Atlanta Journal/Constitution, etc.) contact you or your project, please call or fax Joel Berg or Katherine Gibney immediately.

- 3) If you feel like an interview did not go well - or you suspect that a story will be negative when published, please call or fax Joel Berg or Katherine Gibney immediately.

- 4) Be sure to include the following two standardized paragraphs as part of any press release, brochure, fact sheet, etc. distributed to the public:

"AmeriCorps is the new 'domestic Peace Corps' created by President Clinton and Congress to engage Americans of all backgrounds in direct service to their communities in exchange for an educational benefit that can be used to pay for college, job training, or to repay back student loans.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is running three types of AmeriCorps teams, composed of approximately 1,200 Members serving in 38 states nationwide: an Anti-Hunger Team, a Public Lands and Environment Team, and a Rural Development Team."

5) Project directors are encouraged to solicit local press coverage of their projects without prior consulting with the Washington office. However project managers are responsible for ensuring that all staff, AmeriCorps members, and project sponsors who communicate with the media understand the philosophy and program design of AmeriCorps. Spokes people should emphasize the following:

- A) The concrete results or the anticipated concrete results of projects;
- B) The educational opportunities provided by the voucher;
- C) The principles of boosting civic responsibility and building a common sense of community.

6) Make it clear that AmeriCorps is not a jobs program. Use the word "select" rather than "hire", "community service" rather than "job", AmeriCorps "Member" rather than "employee." Please also make it clear that AmeriCorps is not a volunteer program; again, use the term "Member" not "volunteer." The word "volunteer" should only be used to designate citizens who are recruited by our members to help with their projects but receive no stipend or educational voucher.

7) PLEASE FAX ALL STORIES TO 202-720-4614 AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER PUBLICATION AND MAIL A HARD COPY TO YOUR AGENCY WASHINGTON OFFICE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. PLEASE OBTAIN VIDEOTAPES ON TV NEWS STORIES AND AUDIO TAPES NEWS STORIES TO THE WASHINGTON OFFICE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Debbie Matz, Ali Webb, Martha Phipps
FROM: Joel Berg JB
DATE: April 7 1995
RE: Suggested AmeriCorps Involvement in National Rural Conference

The upcoming National Rural Conference is an excellent opportunity to highlight the Department's AmeriCorps Rural Development Team, thereby focusing on a top priority of the President that also advances the rural development mission of the Department.

1. AmeriCorps Member on a Panel in Illinois

An USDA AmeriCorps Member will be on the Illinois panel on the pressures facing working families. We could invite a local Member --- from Congressman Durbin's district --- to talk about flood relief projects, or we could invite a Member from either Kentucky or Mississippi to talk about rural housing and Empowerment Zone projects. The Member will be hand-picked and highly-prepped to ensure an articulate presentation that fully highlights the great results achieved by the Administration and the Department through AmeriCorps.

2. AmeriCorps Member on a Panel in Iowa

The same AmeriCorps Member who made the presentation in Illinois will be available to make a brief presentation on a panel in Iowa.

3. Possible Events for the President and the Secretary in Iowa

Given that April 25 is also the National Day of Service, I understand that the White House and Eli Segal's office are exploring whether the President can do a brief AmeriCorps event right before he flies out of Iowa. Three possible options:

A. Hold a national teleconference with USDA Rural Development Team Members from our eleven regions throughout the country.

We could accomplish this relatively cheaply by transporting Members from our eleven regions to Ames and then utilizing the satellite transmission equipment and crews that will already be on site. The advantage of this option is that it will allow us to potentially gather a great deal of regional tv coverage around the country, while maintaining focus on rural development issues. The disadvantage of this option is that it might distract the attention of the national press corps from the earlier events during the actual conference:

B. The President and the Secretary could travel to a site (preferably a farm) near Ames to meet with a land owner who has been helped by an AmeriCorps Member.

The closest site may be in Warren County, Iowa. All the USDA AmeriCorps Rural Development Team Members in Iowa would also meet the President and Secretary at the site. The advantage of this option is that would reinforce the rural development message of the day, without distracting the national press corps from the actual conference. The disadvantage of this option is that it would provide the public with only a limited view of wide range service activities performed by AmeriCorps Members.

C. The President and the Secretary could meet with all AmeriCorps Members --- including non-USDA members --- who are doing flood-relief work in Iowa.

The advantage of this option is that it would provide the public with a greater view of the full range of services provided by the entire AmeriCorps program. The disadvantage of this option is that it may overshadow the specific rural development message of the day's conference.

4. AmeriCorps Members Attending Other Regional Conferences

USDA will work with the Corporation for National Service to ensure that all AmeriCorps Members in states with regional conferences who are serving in rural areas --- including non-USDA Members --- will be invited to those conferences.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of
Communications

Washington, D.C.
20250-1300

Correspondence

April 6, 1995

Sandra Armstrong
USDA Rural Development
NRCS Office
1107 South Columbus
Goldendale, Wa. 98620

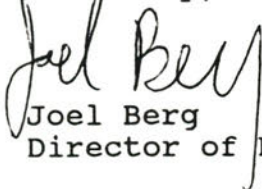
Dear Ms. Armstrong:

I am writing in response to a letter you sent to former Secretary Mike Espy on behalf of the Goldendale Rural Development and Public Lands and Environment Team Members with regard to T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hats with AmeriCorps logos.

I understand that the Team Members have received the sweatshirts since you wrote your letter. With regard to the other items that the Corporation for National Service is providing, be assured that the staff in Washington is working diligently to get this items to you. As this is the first year of AmeriCorps and the USDA program nationwide is so large, there has been a lot of confusion. We are continuing to work with the Corporation to get these items to you. I am sorry that, at this time, I cannot give you an exact date that you will receive them.

Let me take this opportunity to tell you again how pleased I was with the accomplishments of the Goldendale Team Members during my recent visit. You are making history by "getting things done" for America as part of this new and innovative national service initiative.

Sincerely,


Joel Berg

Director of National Service, USDA

Action Office: OC
Referral Code: 3



March 9, 1995

Mike Espy
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Sandra Armstrong
USDA Rural Development
NRCS Office
1107 South Columbus
Goldendale, Wa 98620
(1-509-773-5822)

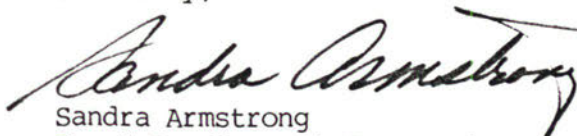
Dear Mr. Espy,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Goldendale USDA Americorps teams. We have a Rural Development team and an environmental team here in Goldendale. We have worked hard on several projects in and for the community and its residents. I have enclosed a few pictures of some of our Americorps Volunteers at work and project sites. I hope you will take the time to preview these pictures. We have been visited by Bill Basl, Olympia and Joel Berg, Washington, DC. They have been quite impressed with the accomplishments we have made in the Klickitat County area.

There are a number of young people on these teams and they were told they would receive a sweat shirt, T-shirt, or hat with the Americorps logo. To this date they have watched Americorps workers and volunteers across the nation on television and in the news papers wearing the Americorps clothing. They have been promised they too will receive some sort of Americorps garment. They have been praised for their work and some appreciation in the form of "wearable Logo" clothing would certainly boost the moral. They have seen other teams receive gratuities in the form of tennis shoes. It is quite difficult for them to reason and understand why they have received little recognition for their volunteer efforts.

So, would you please see what you can do about getting the above mentioned garments to these most deserving young people in Goldendale, WA. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,


Sandra Armstrong
Rural Development Team Member

THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE AMERICORPS PROJECTS THAT HAVE BEEN COMPLETED IN KLICKITAT COUNTY SINCE SEPT. 1994

UPPER PINE CREEK

In the upper Pine Creek area, on state lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources, severe headcutting has created deep gullies which are exacerbated during runoff periods. Log check dams approximately 30' across and 6-8' high were constructed to decrease the velocity of the water flow, trap sediment and restabilize the banks. The dams were constructed using geotextile fabric as well as rocks and alder trees found at the site.

YAKIMA INDIAN NATION HEADSTART

Members of Goldendale AmeriCorps helped prepare and plant a lawn for the new Headstart building in Georgeville.

OBSERVATORY HILL COMMUNITY SERVICE

AmeriCorps members assist the City of Goldendale in clearing brush and diseased trees from area near the Goldendale Observatory. This project has provided firewood for unemployed and otherwise disadvantaged families in the local area. The brush was burned and the area seeded to provide a more parklike setting for residents and visitors to enjoy.

LITTLE KLICKITAT/LARGENT LANE FENCE

This project is aimed at protecting a riparian area along the Little Klickitat River. Stream quality has been threatened as a result of private sheep and cattle ranching. In cooperation with the landowner, a riparian exclosure fence has been constructed to limit access to and degradation of the stream banks.

BUTLER CREEK CANYON

On July 24, 1994 lightning touched off a fire that eventually burned 360 acres in Butler Canyon. Both the effects of the burn and fire suppression efforts have created damage to the stream. The largest potential impacts were seen to be sediment runoff from soils that were burned and disturbed by equipment.

Restoration efforts focused on erosion control through soil stabilization using downed logs at the site. These drainage diversion structures were supplemented with seeding and mulching of the slopes to facilitate revegetation. In addition, straw bale dams were placed at the base of equipment tracks as well as in flow channels, along with erosion control blanket at the stream bank.



April 6, 1995

To: AmeriCorps Staff on OC Payroll or on Direct Detail to OC

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service } B

Subject: Reporting Your Time Worked

I have tried to keep our office as informal and non-bureaucratic as possible --- and wish to continue to do so --- but I do need to clarify my policy relating to hours worked and ask you to supply me with some updated information on your schedules.

All of you should have revised "tours of duty" agreed upon with me --- i.e. the exact hours you are working each day of each week. No matter what flex-time we jointly agree upon, you need to work a total of 80 hours over each two week period. At least a half hour each day must be used for lunch; please note that this time does not count as part of the 80 hours worked. Since many of you sometimes work longer than the 80 hours without taking overtime, I do not mind if you occasionally take longer than the half hour lunch.

Please take the following three steps:

- 1) Provide me by the end of next week with your most recent "tour of duty" schedule indicating precisely which hours you will be working each day of the week, also indicating which hours you may be working in an office other than on our floor in the Administration Building.
- 2) Fill out and personally sign a copy of the attached time-sheet every two weeks, indicating which hours you worked.
- 3) Submit a leave slip for my signature prior to any non-emergency personal leave or non-emergency sick leave you may take. If you need to take emergency personal leave or emergency sick leave, please call me or Denise to indicate approximately how long you expect to be out of the office.

Since I have not designated anyone on staff to act for me in my absence, all such requests when I am travelling should be faxed to me for my signature.

Thanks for your help.

Name					PP #	Date				
Week 1			Hours Worked	Annual Used	Sick Used	Credit Used	Comp Used	Other	Total	
	In	Out								
Sunday										
Monday										
Tuesday										
Wednesday										
Thursday										
Friday										
Saturday										
Total WK 1										
Regular Hours Worked				Credit/Comp/OT Earned						
Week 2			Hours Worked	Annual Used	Sick Used	Credit Used	Comp Used	Other	Total	
	In	Out								
Sunday										
Monday										
Tuesday										
Wednesday										
Thursday										
Friday										
Saturday										
Total WK 2										
Regular Hours Worked				Credit/Comp/OT Earned						

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March

Divider Title: _____



March 24, 1995

SUBJECT: Update on Resolution of AmeriCorps issues in Boston

TO: Joel Berg, Director National Service USDA

Attached is the follow up response concerning issues raised by an AmeriCorps member in Boston, Massachusetts. Cecil Currin, State Conservationist in Massachusetts and Marc MacQueen, AmeriCorps Project Director have met with their local partners to discuss the issues and have planned to resolve the problems. I do think that it is important that we do not over react to complaints about the AmeriCorps projects. We are all learning how to implement the AmeriCorps program. Every effort should be made to first address member complaints within the local project management structure. Only if a problem cannot be resolved at the local level, then the national office should act to correct the situation. If members perceive that they can start from the top and leverage pressure from the national level to handle local issues, then we build a lack of efficiency into the delivery of community service programs. Furthermore, we have insufficient evidence that we are not just responding to a disgruntled member or one whose motives are self-serving.

Where we recognize that there are some issues in Boston to be improved, it is also apparent that these complaints were spawned by a members who has had problems getting along. The information provided for you includes steps to be taken to improve the project management and the direct delivery of services.

Call me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

LLOYD E. WRIGHT
Director, Community Assistance
and Resource Development Division

Attachments

cc:

Tom Weber, Acting Deputy Chief for Programs
Diane E. Gelburd, Acting Regional Conservationist, East
Cecil B. Currin, State Conservationist, MA
Paula Cole Jones, Program Coordinator, National Service and Volunteer Programs



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources
Conservation Service
Formerly Soil Conservation Service

451 West Street
Amherst, MA 01002-2995
Tel. (413) 253-4350

Subject: PER - AmeriCorps - Albertha Lewis

Date: March 21, 1995

To: Lloyd E. Wright, Director
Community Assistance &
Resource Development Division
Natural Resources and Conservation Service
Washington, D.C.

File Code: 360

Faxed is a copy of our report addressing Albertha Lewis's complaints. Albertha has been a problem for Jamiese. She would refuse to go to meetings, leave her job to go pick up her younger sister, leave for long weekends in New York City. She would generally ignore requests from Jamiese and would not leave a working telephone number for communication. Jamiese hasn't been able to contact her since March 8.

The March 14 meeting was very positive.

Thanks,


CECIL B. CURRIN
State Conservationist

Attachment

OPTIONAL FORM 99 (7-90)

FAX TRANSMITTAL

of pages 3

To <i>Lloyd Wright</i>	From <i>Cecil Currin</i>
Dept./Agency <i>NRCS</i>	Phone # <i>413-253-4351</i>
Fax # <i>202-690-0639</i>	Fax # <i>413-253-4375</i>

03/21/95 08:51 508 291 2368

PSA/NRCS Wareham -->1 413 253 4375 ECM Pg. 02/03

U. S. Natural Resources
Conservation
Service

Mass. Community
Assistance
Partnership

15 Cranberry Highway
West Wareham, MA 02576
Tel: (508) 295-1481
FAX: (508) 291-2368

March 21, 1995

Mr. Cecil B. Currin, State Conservationist
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
451 West Street
Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Cecil:

Tuesday, March 14, 1995, you, Pat Cecil and I, from NRCS, and Matthew Goode and Jamiese Martin, of the Suffolk County Conservation District (SCCD), met to discuss several issues and concerns regarding the Mass. AmeriCorps project. Following are the results of that meeting.

One of these issues concerned some verbal complaints that Ms. Albertha Lewis, a Crew Member, had made to several people. After reviewing a list of issues and concerns that the SCCD had with Ms. Lewis's behavior, we told the SCCD they needed to document the history of this issue before they could take any action. We then reviewed Ms. Lewis's complaints: 1) not enough work to do, 2) program management unresponsive to Corps members' concerns, and 3) concern that Corps members wouldn't be able to complete their 1,700 hours of service.

1.) **Members are currently scattered over many sites, in some cases doing work which is not closely connected to urban environmental issues, such as shelving books.** Jamiese indicated that these assignments were established to build relationships for outdoor projects in the Spring.

Approach: We agreed that NRCS would work with the SCCD to plan their projects and insure that crews of people will work on urban environmental issues. (Paula Jones and I, in a telephone conversation March 15, agreed that we needed to have crews actively engaged in meaningful community service as soon as possible. We set the end of March as our deadline.)

2.) **Ms. Martin reviewed what she felt were Ms. Lewis's specific issues.** Ms. Martin says she has required Corps members to handle all concerns having to do with welfare payments, food stamps, AFDC and other social issues themselves. She has supported Corps members, and in some cases gone with them to welfare offices. Ms. Lewis had told Ms. Martin that she felt this was not enough.

Approach: We agreed to set up a communication and grievance procedure that would give all parties: Crew members, Program Managers, NRCS staff, etc. an opportunity to raise issues, discuss their relevance, validity and scope, decide who should address the issues (management, planners, Corps members themselves, etc.), and bring back tentative solutions for all parties to consider and agree upon. We didn't set a deadline for having this process in place, but I propose that we work toward full implementation by April 7, 1995.

3.) Fear that Corps members wouldn't be able to complete their 1,700 hours.

Approach: I informed Ms. Martin that Corps members could continue to work into the next Fiscal Year. I also gave her a worksheet showing how many hours each Corps member had worked to date, and the date by which each would finish if they kept to an 8-hour schedule and either worked or took paid time off every day between now and September 30, 1995. That will permit Ms. Martin and Corps members to decide when they would like to finish, and how many extra hours they need to work to finish by that date.

NRCS - Mass. AmeriCorps Program Management.....Page 2.

Besides the complaints that Ms. Lewis made to Mr. O'Brien, of the Mass. National and Community Service Corporation, she also raised a series of issues when she spoke with me. (Please refer to my memo to you on AmeriCorps Management Issues, dated March 3, 1995.)

To address those:

On health care questions: Ms. Martin said that all Corps members have a complete package of documents on how to use the AmeriCorps Health Plan, and several Corps members have used it successfully. We will help answer other questions if Ms. Martin cannot find out the answer.

On threats to job security and mental abuse: The communication process we're establishing, and weekly unscheduled interviews with Corps members on job sites, should defuse and address those issues. During these interviews we will ask Corps Members for feedback on job progress including work being done, how it is helping their community, benefits, communications, etc.

On Crew members' suggestions for jobs: We will revisit them by March 22. We will also work with Ms. Martin and local project sponsors to plan a series of service projects, so crew members can get out and start working as crews by the end of March.

On crew member placement: Ms. Martin is prepared to pull crew members away as quickly as we can set up outdoor community service work projects.

On taking precipitate action without documentation (suspending employees, etc.): The NRCS administrative staff was invited to meet with Ms. Martin Friday, March 24, to go over proper procedures for timekeeping, personnel action, etc. Ms. Martin has also agreed that I, as NRCS representative for this project, should and would be involved in making all personnel decisions, to insure that all procedures and timetables are followed accurately.

On publicity for AmeriCorps Projects: Ms. Martin and Mr. Goode would like to publicize the projects this summer and are interested in obtaining some readily-identifiable clothing for the participants. NRCS offered the assistance of our Public Affairs Specialist, Alyssa Aldrich.

I believe this covers the main concerns. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,



Marc A. MacQueen, Team Leader
Mass. Community Assistance Partnership

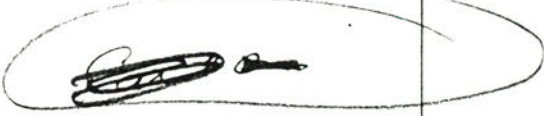
U. S. Natural Resources
Conservation
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Mass. Community
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15 Cranberry Highway
West Wareham, MA 02576
Tel: (508) 295-1481
FAX: (508) 291-2368

March 3, 1995 *Paula*

Subject: AmeriCorps Management Issues
To: Cecil B. Currin, STC
Amherst, MA



I. Yesterday, March 2, Mr. David O'Brien, State Director, Mass. Corporation for National and Community Service, and Atlantic Cluster Director for the National Corporation for National and Community Service, called Joel Berg, USDA AmeriCorps Program Director, to inform him that Albertha Lewis, a Crew Chief on the USDA Boston AmeriCorps Program, had spoken with him about several issues. According to her, AmeriCorps members didn't have enough to do; The group managing the AmeriCorps Program did not seem responsive to Members' problems; Members were concerned about having enough time to work their 1,700 service hours.

II. Joel Berg passed the comments along to Lloyd Wright, NRCS-Community Assistance, who called your office, and I heard from you this morning, March 3.

III. As I was following those complaints up, I received a call from Ms. Lewis, (about 9:00 a.m.) who described her concerns more fully. According to Ms. Lewis:

The entire AmeriCorps Program is in jeopardy. Corps members' rights are being disregarded, and their questions are not being answered. Specifically, she's having trouble getting answers about health care; whenever she has asked Jamiese for information, Jamiese tells her to "call AmeriCorps". Apparently, some medical providers don't recognize the AmeriCorps health insurance, so members have to go without care or expect to pay out-of-pocket. People's jobs are being threatened without cause; one person was suspended with no written warning (and hired back the next day). Jamiese tells crew members that they can be fired at will, and that there are 8 people waiting for every slot that becomes vacant.

Suggestions from employees about potential jobs are disregarded or refused, and members are doing work that has little to do with the urban environment. Albertha feels that crews are concentrating more on Healthy Boston interests than on environmental projects. She says people don't have a work plan, and often don't know what's going to happen from one day to the next.

In their concern about getting in their 1,700 hours of service, crew members have given Jamiese 25 written suggestions for environmental projects that could be done to bank hours. Apparently, many of these can be done in any weather, so could be done in winter. Albertha says all suggestions have been disregarded.

Some crew members have been verbally attacked (called stupid, told they couldn't think). Jamiese has placed crew members with many organizations. Some of the placements (elementary school library, museum, food banks) seem inappropriate. Albertha ended up re-shelving books at an elementary school; she says she didn't know why she went there, nor does she think the school knew why she was there either. Further, many of the placement interviews were, in her opinion, poorly prepared: Corps members wouldn't know very much about the organizations they were being placed with; the organizations didn't necessarily have a clear idea of what to expect from Members. After the call from Albertha, I spoke with you and Pat Cecil, who suggested that we meet with Jamiese and Matthew Goode, from the Suffolk Conservation District, to discuss these issues.

IV. Early this afternoon I called Jamiese to review Albertha's concerns, and to set up a meeting. She told me that "Albertha was a big pain in the neck", that the school principal and the librarian had called to complain about Albertha, and that she (Jamiese) was getting a group of personnel specialists from her Healthy Boston Coalition together next Tuesday (3/7), at 5:30 pm, to discuss what to do about Albertha. She had received a letter from Albertha today stating that she (Albertha) could not work at the elementary school for health reasons, and would be seeking medical assistance.

She also said she didn't want Matthew and her to meet with you, me and Pat Cecil, because she felt it would turn into a "my word against yours" meeting, with accusations and counter-accusations. Instead, she preferred to have some of the placement organizations there, as well as another Crew Chief when she met with us, and suggested Thursday or Friday of next week (Wednesday is a conflict for Matthew Goode). After discussing Albertha, Jamiese stated that she expected two other crew members to quit (they hadn't kept appointments at their placement site), and two more to switch from full-time to part-time.

V. At about 2:00 p.m. I spoke with Melora Balson, Mass. Youth Services Alliance, who told me that Albertha had called her February 24, to discuss her questions about health care coverage, deductibles, education loan forbearance, etc. Melora suggested Albertha call me; she also said she'd call Mr. O'Brien to alert him to the situation. O'Brien called Albertha, who shared her concerns with him. He then called Meg McGuire, National Direct Program Director for the Corporation for National and Community Service, who called Joel Berg, who called Lloyd Wright, etc.

VI. At about 3:00 p.m. I spoke with Mr. O'Brien, who suggested three meetings: 1) he and I should meet with Albertha; 2) he should meet with NRCS people, Jamiese and Matthew; 3) he and I should meet with crew members, to hear their concerns and give them a chance to discuss whatever issues they see. I am willing to meet with Mr. O'Brien and Albertha, but since his presence complicates the picture, and adds one more layer, I'd like to hear what you and Paula Jones think before agreeing to set that up.

VII. At 4:00 p.m. I called Dan Lenthall to inform him of all this. He suggests that you and Mr. O'Brien set up a meeting, which I, Dan, Pat Cecil and others might attend, at your suggestion. I'll do it either way, but I want a clear signal from you and Paula about whether or not it is appropriate to involve him in this issue.

VIII. Several meetings may or will occur:

1) Jamiese is setting up a meeting of personnel specialists for Tuesday, 3/7, at 5:30 p.m., to discuss what to do about Albertha. If you want, I will attend and take notes.

2) Jamiese wants to know if Thursday, 3/9 is convenient for you. It is fine for Pat Cecil and me. Jamiese wants to have others besides her and Matthew there; in my opinion, since we are paying the Suffolk CD to run this project, we can specify with whom we would like to meet.

3) Mr. O'Brien has suggested his series of meetings. Since my telephone call from Albertha was, in effect, a meeting, I'm not interested in going any further with that until you and Paula Jones have agreed.

IX. Regardless of the truth or accuracy of anyone's statements, we need to address what's going on. At the very least there appear to be significant communication problems, and people need to come to some agreement on where members should work, what constitutes urban environmental activity, how crews are supervised and managed, what criteria should exist for placing Corps members, how much say crew members have in deciding their duties, etc. Please let me know what you think.

X. At 4:50 p.m. Matthew Goode called to say that he was only interested in meeting with us under the following conditions:

- 1.) Any complainant must make the complaint (to whoever he or she chose) in writing.
- 2.) That person should then ask the complainant if he had sent a copy to Jamiese or Matthew.
- 3.) Once the complainant had sent a copy to Matthew or Jamiese, they should have the opportunity to respond to the complainant in writing, and send us a copy.
- 4.) Then, if there were questions, he would be willing to meet. Otherwise, he felt meetings based on hearsay, telephone calls, etc. were a waste of time and energy.

Marc A. MacQueen

Marc A. MacQueen, Team Leader
Mass. Community Assistance Partnership

cc: Paula Jones, Pat Cecil, Jamiese Martin, Matthew Goode, Dan Lenthall

Dime

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- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
- b(3) Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA]
- b(4) Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA]
- b(6) Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]
- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]



UNITED
STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

March 15, 1995

To: Rick Allen, Larry Wilson, Meg Maguire
From: Joel Berg JB
Subject: Update on G.A.O. Audit

This morning, for two hours, I met with C. Jeff Appel, Senior Program Evaluator, and Carol B. Patey, Issue Area Manager, from the General Accounting Office. I believe --- perhaps naively --- that the interview went exceedingly well. I was able to use the time mostly to describe our program's accomplishments and argue repeatedly that they should measure not only the costs of our program, but the multitude of benefits as well.

They asked me --- and I answered --- questions about the general role of Federal agencies in AmeriCorps, the services our Members perform, the reasons why almost all of our CNCS grant goes to our 150 Anti-Hunger Team members, what obstacles we faced in start-up, and what specific role my office plays in overseeing our projects across the country. They asked how we will ensure that all our Members actually provided 1,700 hours of service; they seemed please when I explained that each of our project managers had the explicit legal responsibility to certify time-sheets before Members were payrolled every pay period.

They also asked for my suggestions as to which of our sites to visit. I suggested our Vermont sites and gave them two reasons: we have all three of our project types in Vermont and they are close to their base office in Boston. I also knew that our Vermont projects were among the best in the nation.

They also asked for the following information to be provided to them by next week:

- 1) An actual number or estimate for the number of Members who have already left the program.
- 2) The number of Members --- out of our 1,200 allocated slots --- who are actually in the program now.

- 3) A copy of both the original and revised AmeriCorps/USDA operations manual used internally by our program.
- 4) An accounting of how much monetary and in-kind support has been provided by non-Federal entities to USDA-sponsored projects.
- 5) The number of Members receiving health care and child care.
- 6) A comparison of our expected health care and child care costs to our current, actual health care and child care costs.
- 7) The budget for my immediate office at the Departmental level.
- 8) Any explanatory notes in the USDA budget proposal that referenced AmeriCorps.

(File) | 1st Quarter
Report

March 13, 1995

To: Regional Facilitators

From: Joel Berg

JB

13 pages, including this cover

Please review this draft memo to so we can discuss it in our next conference call.

Please do not share this draft with project managers until we discuss it.

Thanks you.

DRAFT

March 6, 1995

To:

USDA AmeriCorps Project Managers and Facilitators

From:

Joel Berg, Director of National Service, USDA
Paula Cole Jones
Lou Woltering,
David Gibson,
Jim Coyle,
Larry Winston,
Charles Simms,
Donna Hines,

Subject:

Primary Challenges Identified in Our First Quarter Reports

We have now had the opportunity to thoroughly review all your quarterly reports. All of you should soon be receiving copies of our summary of those reports that was submitted to the Corporation for National and Community Service. It is clear that the program is going incredibly well after only few months of operation, and that all of you are to be congratulated heartily for helping build USDA/AmeriCorps projects that are "Getting Things Done" in a highly impressive fashion throughout the country.

However, we also asked you to provide an honest assessment of the challenges, difficulties, and problems you faced --- and most of you responded frankly and thoughtfully. It is important for you to know that our request for such information was **not** pro-forma; in fact, we believe such insight is absolutely vital to our efforts at Total Quality Management and continuous improvement of AmeriCorps.

The following quote from Corporation for National and Community Service Chief Executive Officer Eli J. Segal is appropriate to this process:

"In AmeriCorps, the only forgivable sin should be complacency. If one manager says, 'Everything's going great' and the second says 'here's two problems and here's how we want to fix them,' I will go with the second every time."

Therefore, summarized below are your most-frequently cited challenges. They are broken down --- in order of frequency mentioned --- by issues that primarily need to be dealt with by either the Corporation for National and Community Service, by USDA here at the Washington level, or by you and your Members at the local and state level. Of course, almost all the challenges need to be addressed by all three levels of management. In each case, we have provided a few word description of the problem cited, a number representing how many reports cited this as a problem, and, most importantly, a brief description of how we may be able to address the problem. In all cases where we are changing or clarifying policy, those changes or clarifications will be reflected in the revised operations manual which will be sent to you shortly.

Corporation for National and Community Service Issues

Issue

Number of times cited

Members have no uniforms or improper uniforms

16

We are now working to provide every site with at least one AmeriCorps button per Member so that every Member --- including Rural Development Team Members --- can always wear at least one item at all times identifying them with AmeriCorps. We are also working closely with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to provide one set of tee-shirts and sweatshirts to every site that has not yet received them. We will be deciding in the next two weeks whether the Department will, this year, print its own USDA/AmeriCorps tee-shirts for Environmental Team Members and polo shirts for Rural Development Team Members. For next year, we will work closely with project managers and the Corporation for National and Community Service to build into each site's budget funds for a complete set of uniforms that are clearly identify as both AmeriCorps and USDA, and are appropriate for the weather endured and type of service performed by each AmeriCorps Member.

Difficulty obtaining child care

11

Child care is a difficult problem that vexes not only AmeriCorps, but most social programs. However, we are continuing to work closely with CNCS to resolve individual child care problems. Please inform us immediately on any specific problems you may have in this regard. Also, please provide any suggestions how either the law or the regulations of CNCS can be modified to improve the delivery of child care services for eligible Members.

Confusion about health care benefits3

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about who qualifies for health care benefits and what exact benefits they can expect --- we will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well.

Confusion about child care eligibility2

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about who qualifies for child care benefits and what exact benefits they can expect --- we will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well.

Lack of AmeriCorps signs2

USDA will work to obtain more signs from NRCS and distribute them to the field. If we have additional funds, we will also print Departmental signs. At your request, we can also provide information how you can procure, out of your project budget, magnetic AmeriCorps signs for the sides of your vehicles.

Six week replacement rule2

Responding to a great amount of input from many AmeriCorps projects, CNCS modified the "six week replacement rule," to allow some back-filling of vacant positions as long as the vacancies are filled at the same time to create new "classes" of Members. Please refer to the January 25, 1995 memorandum on this matter from Dianna Rodriguez Algra of CNCS that should have previously been sent to you.

Confusion about what benefits are taxed2

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about what benefits -- including the educational voucher -- are subject to taxes. We will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well. To change this would require Congress to amend the law to specifically exempt the educational voucher from Federal incomes taxes, but it is unclear whether the current Congress would support such an amendment.

Confusion About Private Loan Forgiveness2

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about exactly which education loans can be forgiven --- we will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well.

USDA Washington Office IssuesIssueNumber of times citedMembers have no access to computers15

RECD is now making a concerted attempt to provide computers -- and Internet connections --- to most of their Rural Development Team Members. The Department will continue to work with agencies to obtain surplus computers --- or at least frequent access to computers --- for our AmeriCorps members. However, in this time of scarce resources, it is impossible for us to guarantee at this time that all our Members will have computers, particularly given that some USDA employees still do not have their own computers.

Difficulty in recruitment/short time frames8

We are committed to providing a longer recruitment time-frame this year than last year for all our sites. While we can not officially offer positions to Members for next year until our application for renewal to CNCS is approved in June, but you can certainly began informal recruitment efforts for next year. Until we have a revised Member application approved by OMB, you can ask applicants to fill out last year's application.

Not enough time to prepare reports/paperwork6

We realize that we originally placed a tremendous reporting burden on you with very short turn-around times. To redress this problem we'll offer you a deal: since we have now specified all the major reports and forms due to us for the remainder of the project year, we hope you will have adequate time to prepare them and thus make it a priority to submit them on deadline. We have also tried to ease your burden by providing sample reports --- the sample first quarter report was less than three pages long. Next year, before the start of the program, will provide a report schedule for the entire year.

Members not used to Federal government 6

We recommend that all Member training programs focus heavily on helping Members understand the unique environment they are about to enter and the special rules and regulations they will have to follow.

Not enough budget for travel 5

We will take special care to work with all applicants for next year to ensure that you have adequate funds in your original proposal to meet realistic travel needs.

Lack of or difficulty obtaining equipment 5

We will take special care to work with all applicants for next year to ensure that you have adequate funds in your original proposal to meet realistic equipment needs. We will also provide project managers with information about how they may be able to obtain surplus equipment from the Defense Department.

Members want more cluster time/with other Members 5

Although three project managers cited below said their Members spend too much time in required cluster meetings, five different quarterly reports filed by Members themselves stated they spent far too little time in cluster meetings or with other Members. One reality of AmeriCorps is that the goal of "getting things done" is sometimes in conflict with the other goals of "building community, opportunity, and responsibility." We will continue to work with project managers, facilitators, and Members to obtain feedback on ways to best build an AmeriCorps identity and provide constant support and reinforcement for Members without significantly decreasing the amount of quality service performed. One way to deal with this dilemma is to use cluster meetings for joint service and/or training activities that also "get things done," rather than just static meetings in offices. We are anxious to hear reports from the field how project managers, facilitators, and Members have successfully balanced all the multiple missions of AmeriCorps. We will grant wide latitude to project managers and facilitators to utilize a great variety of clustering methods that advance the AmeriCorps vision. However, we can not accept project managers simply ignoring the cluster meeting requirements without providing an adequate alternative. In addition, next year the Department will be stricter in refusing to approve applications for Rural Development Team projects that do not meet the cluster requirement of having a group of no fewer than five Members within a fifty mile or one hour drive of a central meeting point.

Lack of funding for project work5

Many projects complained that, while their agencies may have given them money to support the Members themselves, the agency did not give them money for actual work projects, such as conservation measure installations, home renovation, and dry fire hydrants placements. It is critical that our projects have funds to pay for these projects -- or the Members may be wasting their time planning projects that will never be implemented. Thus, such funding should be built into all applications for next year -- to be provided either by the agency or by partners.

Too much time preparing reports3

The formats and samples we have provided for reports should now make it clearer than ever that we are always asking for very brief and concise reports that state the key facts in plain, non-technical, language. Furthermore, facilitators should be able to help project managers prepare these reports.

Project managers say too much cluster time3

See response above to Members who reported that they want more time in clusters.

Communication between state office and field3

The agencies and the AmeriCorps facilitators will double their efforts in making sure our on-site project managers receive critical information as quickly as possible.

Member Want to Talk to Other Members Nationally2

We will provide a complete site list for all project managers and Members --- along with a brief description of the service performed at that site --- so Members on their own can either individually call or arrange cluster conference calls with other sites around the country. In addition, Facilitators will be increasing their efforts to set-up such calls. Lastly, we are investigating the possibility of holding a teleconference in the near future for all USDA project sites.

Need training about all USDA agencies

2

We encourage all project managers to teach Members --- preferably in the initial orientation --- about the functions all major USDA agencies, not just the particularly agency sponsoring that project.

AmeriCorps vision at odds with agency mission

1

Confusion over competing missions can be clarified with more specific agreements over the original applications, the community service objectives, and the work plans.

Liability and Workmen's Compensation Confusion

1

These issues will be clarified in our revised operations manual.

Not enough budget for training

1

We encourage you to create new partnerships with other entities --- such as your state Extension Service or state Commission on National Service --- to provide training. In addition, we will take special care to work with all applicants for next year to ensure that you have adequate funds in your original proposal to meet realistic training needs.

Payroll not flexible enough

1

We are working with the National Finance Center, which processes USDA AmeriCorps paychecks, to determine whether next year our payroll system can be more flexible to accommodate the varied work schedules and cash-flow needs of our Members.

Lack of stationary

1

Within the next two weeks, we will provide project managers with a new USDA/AmeriCorps logo on slicks and/or on computer diskettes for you to create your own stationary. If our funding permits, we will attempt to print stationary Departmentally and send it to project sites.

Local Project Manager/Facilitator/Member Issues

Issue Number of times cited

Members need computer training12

We suggest project managers make special efforts to partner with local educational institutions to provide computer training for Members. Perhaps members could do a one day service project at an educational site in exchange for such training. At a minimum, project managers should be able to provide easy-to-understand "how to" books for Members about the software they are using.

Problems in RD with partners lack of interest/trust12

The Rural Development Team Member training in Memphis the week of March 20 will focus heavily of developing ways to build community trust and support for our projects. We urge Members or project staff who have been having particular difficulties in this area to try to attend this training. We will also work to develop long-term written materials on this topic.

Need grant writing training6

First, we believe it is important to clarify that no USDA AmeriCorps Member should be spending the bulk of his or her service year simply writing grants. However, project managers may want to consult with local educational institutions or consultants about obtaining grant writing training for members who need to spend a small part of their time writing grant applications as part of their overall work plan.

No phones and/or desks for Members5

Every Rural Development Team Member should have a desk or phone available for them the day they start their service. Given our much longer time frames for next year, we should be able to make this a reality. This may require early and intensive planning by sites as soon as they learn in June that they will be receiving members that will start in September.

Members unclear of what of what to do5

It is our legal responsibility to ensure that all our Members have a clear understanding each day of the service that they are expected to perform that day. This should be clarified by matching-up clearly defined community service objectives with clearly-defined weekly workplans.

Work ethic of Members/difficulty with diverse Members5

Project managers and facilitators need to spend a great deal of personal time with all Members in order to help them function as a diverse and effective team working hard each and every day. In truth, our AmeriCorps staff need to be a combination of the following on different occasion: boss, surrogate parent, friend, mentor, peer, social worker, and disciplinarian. While Members should not be "coddled" and inappropriate behavior should never be tolerated, USDA staff should go to great lengths to be especially sensitive to generational, gender, racial, and disability issues. Our future staff trainings will focus on these issues. In the meantime, we can provide project managers with outside facilitators trained in these issues to help with particular problems; if you need such help, please inform us immediately. In addition, by improving recruitment for next year, we can ensure that all prospective Members are given a clear idea of the difficulties and benefits of the service they will performing; increasing the number of diverse applications and thus increasing our recruitment selectivity is one of the best ways to build teams that perform well.

Lack of support from offices/doing grunt work5

No AmeriCorps Member should every be placed in an office without the full support of that office's supervisor. No member should every be asked to spend the bulk of their service year performing "grunt work" such as filing, sending mass mailings, shredding documents, answering phones, making copies, filling out forms, getting snacks for meeting, etc. It is the responsibility of project mangers to ensure that Members are continually implementing community service projects that meet critical local needs and are above and beyond the routine work of sponsoring organization.

Members dropping out to obtain other employment4

Even though the "six-week replacement" rule has been modified to allow agencies to back-fill on a selected basis when there are vacancies, it is still critical to reduce turnover as much as possible. One of the ways to do so is to improve the recruitment process, as suggested above. Also, during recruitment and throughout the program,

it should be stressed that the members are performing national service, are not working at a job, and are fully expected to fulfill their 1,700 commitment to the nation. It should also be continually stressed that Members will not receive pro-rated educational awards if they simply leave the program. However, if your project has a particularly high attrition rate, there are probably some structural problems with your projects that you should discuss with us.

Supervision too time-costly

3

We understand that AmeriCorps management and supervisory functions have taken much more staff time than you or your supervisors ever anticipated, but we hope all our field staff agree that the productive service performed by the Members has more than made up for the resources placed in the program by your agency. The fact remains that all AmeriCorps Members --- no matter their service tasks or their educational backgrounds--- need continual support and supervision. Facilitators should be asked to help with select tasks. If project a manager is unable to provide such support either personally, by assigning other staff to the task, or by obtaining partners that can provide that support, the manager should apply for fewer, or no, Members next year.

Weather conditions prevent planned work

3

We highly recommend that each site engaged in outdoors activities build-in contingency plans for the weather into all their workplans. We would be glad to provide you with examples of alternative activities engaged in by other sites during times of poor weather.

Not enough supervision

3

It is important that we work together to make sure Members get the supervision they need. See above sections on "Members Unclear of What to Do" and "Supervision Too Time-Costly."

Turnover in local elected officials

2

While rapid change is --- depending on your personal point of view ---- an either fortunate or unfortunate reality of our political system, Members can mitigate their dependence on rapidly-changing political leaders by also building partnerships with non-governmental entities locally.

Members not getting critical information from office 2

We encourage project managers to at least briefly review all the materials we send you, and then ensure that the Members themselves get as much of this information that you believe they would want or would help them better perform their service.

Lack of local interest after not getting EZ or EC designation 2

The Rural Development Team Member training in Memphis the week of March 20 will provide some guidance on this problem.

Transportation to job site/lack of vehicles 2

We are attempting to develop a way to work with the General Services Administration to ease our ability to lease government vehicles.

Lack of orientation for Members 1

All Members should receive training up-front in the AmeriCorps program design and visions, as well as the specific technical techniques they will need to perform their service. Our next general staff training will focus on proven orientation techniques.

Members not used to residential camp 1

We encourage recruiters to attempt to give applicants the greatest possible sense of camp life in a residential program before they are selected.

Supervisor too far away from Members 1

Where project managers are physically separated from the Members by significant distances, we encourage the managers to overcompensate by travelling to the actual site frequently, by working with other potential supervisors closer to the site, and by speaking with the Members regularly by phone. Facilitators should also be asked to help with select tasks.

Personal Leave Time is Not enough

1

The personal leave granted to Members is similar to the amount of time given to new USDA employees.

Lack of flexibility on number of Members in state

1

In applying for projects next year, we encourage states to consider very carefully exactly how many Members their projects will require -- and exactly how many Members they can properly manage --- since it is very difficult for the Department to later change the number in states.

USDA employees resent AmeriCorps

1

We will work with project managers to better communicate to all USDA employees the benefits and results of AmeriCorps, constantly stressing that AmeriCorps Members are not Federal employees and are not performing tasks normally performed by Federal employees. We strongly encourage project managers to immediately introduce new AmeriCorps Members to all USDA employees working in a given office.

Friction integrating with pre-existing youth corps

1

We must all make a special effort to ensure that the cooperative agreements we sign with youth corps specifically delineate the duties and responsibilities of all entities involved in managing the program.

We hope this process responding to your challenges helps you better understand how we in Washington are dedicated to continually obtaining your feedback to improve this program, based on constant and serious self-assessment. We hope you will come to realize that not only are we sincere when we asked for criticism, but that we actually act upon your advice. This process has provided us all with concrete ways we can do better.

Thank you once again for your role in building AmeriCorps and writing a vital new chapter in American history.

CC: Corporation for National Service



UNITED
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DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

March 9, 1995

To: USDA AmeriCorps Project Managers and Facilitators
From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service *JB*
Subject: Activities on April 25, the "National Day of Service"

As part of National Volunteer Week, the Corporation for National and Community Service, Youth Service America, and the Points of Light Foundation are jointly sponsoring a "National Day of Service" on April 25, 1995.

We hope that all USDA AmeriCorps sites will be able to take leadership roles on that day by planning events that will **recruit local community volunteers** to serve side-by-side with our AmeriCorps Members on large-scale community service projects. Such signature projects --- meeting unmet environmental, human, public safety, or educational needs --- could occur before most local residents go to work, during the lunch hour, after normal working hours, and/or throughout the day.

Wherever possible, try to plan activities that bring together USDA AmeriCorps Members sponsored by different USDA agencies. Additionally, please attempt to team-up with non-USDA AmeriCorps programs in your area. Please coordinate with your state commission on national and community service before you finalize your plans. Please also consider inviting notable local leaders, including business executives, non-profit organization heads, educational officials, celebrities, religious leaders, and elected officials, including congresspeople, senators, and governors.

As soon as you have finalized your plans for April 25, please fax us the attached form at (202) 720-4614, so we will be able to include your information in a Departmental press release we will be distributing to the national media. Please try to respond by April 10, 1995.

If you have any questions about this day, please contact your agency AmeriCorps coordinator or me directly at (202) 720-6350.

I thank you in advance for your help in ensuring that USDA AmeriCorps projects play a significant role in the "National Day of Service."

**USDA/AMERICORPS
NATIONAL DAY OF SERVICE RESPONSE FORM**

Location and state where National Day of Service project will be performed:

USDA agency or agencies from which AmeriCorps Members will be participating:

Number of USDA AmeriCorps Members expected to participate: _____

Counties of the duty stations of USDA AmeriCorps Members expected to participate:

Name of any non-USDA AmeriCorps projects expected to participate: _____

Estimated number of community volunteers also expected to participate: _____

Any local leaders confirmed to attend: _____

Brief description of the type of service to be performed: _____

Name and number of contact person for day's project: _____

Please fax to (202) 720-4614 when complete.

Call (202) 720-6350 with any questions.



UNITED
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OF AGRICULTURE

March 8, 1995

To: Paul Johnson, Chief
Natural Resources and Conservation Service

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service JB

Subject: Follow-Up on NRCS First Quarter Report

Background

Per your request in our conversation a few weeks ago, I am providing you with a detailed discussion of the successes and challenges experienced by NRCS AmeriCorps projects in their first few months of operation.

The good news is that most of the NRCS AmeriCorps projects are meeting both your vision of AmeriCorps and the President's vision of AmeriCorps. If I understand your vision correctly, it is that AmeriCorps Members should provide grass-roots service in a wide variety of areas critical to your agency's missions while obtaining technical knowledge about natural resources work that may someday allow them to become valuable employees of your agency. The vision of the President --- as interpreted by Eli Segal and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) --- is that AmeriCorps Members should perform concrete, measurable, and direct service "getting things done" in communities that would not normally be provided by the Federal government, while promoting community, opportunity, and responsibility.

I hope by now you have received a copy of our very impressive first quarter report detailing the amazing early successes of the Department's program. NRCS AmeriCorps Members made remarkable progress in sustainable agriculture, flood-relief, urban greening, rural economic development, emergency prevention, fisheries restoration, alternative uses of natural resources, environmental education, tourism development, recycling promotion, water quality protection, and cultural and historic resource preservation.

The bad news is that a small minority of NRCS AmeriCorps projects are still not fully meeting our shared visions and thus threaten to significantly undermine public and Congressional support for the entire AmeriCorps program.

While NRCS has taken important steps to redress such problems with projects, some may only be able to be fixed with a greater commitment of NRCS staff and/or budget resources allocated at your level.

Continuous improvement of our programs is dependent upon continuous improvement of our program at every level, including my own. Our AmeriCorps project managers in the field have identified numerous problems for which my office, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the agencies are responsible. We are busy working together to address all such problems on the Departmental and CNCS level, and we hope all our agencies take similar steps.

Summary of Problems faced by NRCS Programs

I have learned about most of the problems below through a thorough reading of each site's first quarter reports, site visits, phone conversations with AmeriCorps Members and staff, and weekly reports prepared by Regional Facilitators. Some of these problems were brought to my attention by complaints to CNCS, Congressional correspondence or calls, or media reports.

- 1) Some Environmental Teams --- particularly those in urban areas --- do not have management structures adequate enough to supervise the day-to-day activities of their highly diverse groups of AmeriCorps Members.
- 2) Some Environmental Teams have been, in effect, changed to Rural Development - type teams without adequately modifying the program design and without approving those changes with my office or with the CNCS.
- 3) Some states which received Members to specifically support flood-relief work in the areas damaged by the Midwest Flood of 1993 are engaging Members in service that has virtually no connection to relief from that flood.
- 4) Some Rural Development Team Members are spending the bulk of their service year performing routine paper work in offices.
- 5) Some Rural Development Team Members are performing work that may violate the provisions of the National and Community Service's Act that prohibit AmeriCorps Members from duplicating the work of existing employees of government agencies or other sponsoring organizations.
- 6) Some Rural Development Team Members do not seem to understand the AmeriCorps vision and believe they are in a regular professional job.
- 7) Some sites still have community service objectives or quarterly report accomplishments that are too vague to defend to Congress, the media, or the public.

- 8) Some projects do not have enough funding to adequately support project work, Member training, or Member travel.
- 9) Some states ignored the "clustering" requirements of the Rural Development Team and thus have made it difficult for Members to meet together regularly.
- 10) Some Members seems to be improperly spending the bulk of the service year engaged in public affairs activities.
- 11) Many sites have disseminated inaccurate information about AmeriCorps to the public because they ignored the Department's requirement that all AmeriCorps press releases be approved in advance by the USDA Office of Communications.

Some Examples of Successful NRCS AmeriCorps Projects

It is precisely because so many NRCS projects are going so well that I feel confident pushing the other projects to do better. Some examples of greatest successes:

Environmental Team

* Repaired and restored five reservoir flood-damaged recreation areas in Kansas by fixing 22 miles of fence, cleaning five miles of shoreline, removing 160 damaged trees, clearing 3 miles of trails, replanting 40 trees, re-creating fish habitats, repairing 50 picnic tables, restoring five restrooms, repairing one bridge, trimming 3 miles of trees on dikes, cleaning out one outdoor learning classroom, debris from 2 miles of roads, and posting signs on 19 miles of roads.

* In Western Oklahoma, restored 15 windbreaks originally created by the Civilian Conservation Corps on 7.5 miles of land in five counties.

* In and around Baytown, Texas, cleaned and mowed five 10-meter by 75-meter ponds, vegetated two acres of marsh demonstration projects, harvested and threshed by hand 4 acres of smooth cordgrass seed, harvested by hand and then planted 800 mangrove seeds, harvested, threshed, and planted 3,000 Scirpus seeds. Members also assisted the Red Cross in flood relief efforts in the Houston area by loading and unloading trucks and delivering supplies to local flood victims.

* In Nebraska, Members designed three recreation trails, cleaned up an urban wetland "Heron Haven" owned by the local Audubon Club, revitalized the Lincoln Normal historical project, improved 20 miles of recreation trails, assisted in flood debris removal from 14 sites at the National Arbor Day Foundation headquarters, helped prepare an inspection and maintenance report of flood control facilities, maintained and improved historical sites, and performed recreation and conservation maintenance in Lower Elkhorn River area and Norfolk public parks.

* In areas damaged by the floods of 1993 in Central Illinois, Members developed 1.3 miles of hiking trails, improved five acres of camp sites, and pruned 5 acres of evergreen trees at a Pittsfield City Park. Members also removed about 15 tons of debris (tires, appliances, automobiles, etc.) from half of mile of a stream that outlets into a city-owned recreation lake for the City of Rushville. In Kampsville, Members replaced 75 feet of sidewalks damaged during the flood. Members in Quincy also renovated a brick road in an historic alley.

* In Portland, Oregon, Members at the Whitaker Pond Restoration improved 150 feet of pond bank by removing pest species including blackberries, night shade, and everlasting pea then revegetating the area. Members also revegetated three acres on the northern portion of Fairview Creek. The Members worked-side-by-side with 80 different community volunteers who served 450 volunteer hours.

* Members in Goldendale, Washington, rebuilt a half-mile stretch of fence that protects a key riparian area along the Little Klickitat River. Members also protected water quality on one mile of stream by treating 300 acres with log check dams across steep slopes and installed eight sediment retention dams. They also protected Pine Creek by installing eight log check dams, built a new playground at a Head Start Center on the Yakima Indian Reservation, removed dozens of pick-up dead wood on public lands and provided them as firewood for low-income families.

Rural Development Team

* In California, Member in Petaluma has begun water quality sampling on three adjacent dairies and has completed one conservation plan. In Santa Rosa, Member has trained one dairy operator to use a water quality test kits developing plans to provide such assistance to members of four different local organizations, and has completed inventory work for a watershed group.

- * Members on the Vermont Fire Protection project contacted 48 Fire Departments in Vermont, installed one dry fire hydrant, performed 30 dry fire hydrant site surveys, and initiated and participated in meetings with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Fire Safety Association, Vermont Fire Chiefs Association, and Vermont League of Cities and Towns.
- * In Michigan, Members conducted quality assessments and provided water quality protect plans to 29 farm families.
- * In Minnesota, Members based in Hiawatha began work to improve forage/grassland conditions to the good or excellent category on 5,000 acres, affecting 50 farmers in 11 counties. Members based in Thief River Falls began work to improve water quality and reduce producer fertilizer input costs by developing and implementing animal waste nutrient utilization and management plans on 120 livestock operations.
- * In South Carolina, Members conducted waste water sampling of waste management facilities (lagoons) and prepared detailed summary reports for 16 individual farm systems; this testing procedure was the first in South Carolina and will serve as a model for other conservation activities. They also tested 600 different soil samples to determine croplands with high levels of phosphorus and acidity and prepared a report on their findings to local farmers.
- * In Redlands, California, Members have surveyed three dairies totaling 130 acres, eventually leading to recycling or eliminating 6,867 tons of waste once practices have been implemented. Each farmer saved an average of about \$9,000 by having the service performed by AmeriCorps members instead of private contractors. The Members also completed a survey of a five-acre ranch which will eventually lead to the recycling of 26.5 tons of waste a year.
- * In Maine, Member sorted 78 samples of ichthoplankton, identifying eggs and larvae in the samples, in order to aid in the restoration of striped bass through locating and protecting spawning areas in the Kennebec and Eastern Rivers. Transferred 20,000 individual shads from grow-out ponds into a re-stocking truck.
- * Members based in the Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council in Tennessee have dewatered 2.5 million gallons of waste from the storage facilities of five local landowners, and collected soil samples at those sites to ensure safe discharge.
- * In Louisiana, Members performed over 100 pre-assessment surveys that benefited over 100 rural families by identifying threats water quality on their home and farmsteads. They made presentations on the water quality program to 240 high school students.

* Based in Morgantown, West Virginia, a Member performed an archaeological inventory on five major sites in economically depressed sites around the state in order to provide cultural resource protection through inventory, investigation, and documentation of sites. At one site, he discovered three historic and one pre-historic sites that he will be documenting. He also worked with another AmeriCorps member to develop Fort Randolph --- a Civil War fort in Point Pleasant --- for public use.

IN EACH CASE LISTED ABOVE OF A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT, WE CAN SITE MEASURABLE, QUANTIFIABLE, NUMERICAL COMMUNITY SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT ARE IMPORTANT NOT JUST TO OUR OWN AGENCY, BUT ARE CLEARLY HELPFUL TO THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY.

Problems with Environmental Team Management Structures

Some Environmental Teams --- particularly those in urban areas --- do not have management structures adequate enough to supervise the day-to-day activities of their highly diverse groups of AmeriCorps Members. Given the fact that many Environmental Team Members are either high school drop-outs or recent high school graduates, these Teams need an especially vigilant and sensitive amount of supervision. To address this concern, on June 15, 1994, I wrote a memorandum to all agencies --- including NRCS --- which outlined the management structures necessary for all USDA AmeriCorps projects; the memorandum stated, in part:

"For both legal and policy reasons, all AmeriCorps participants must be managed by at least one employee whose full-time job is to manage that AmeriCorps site. Both the requirements of the work projects planned and the requirements of AmeriCorps that are specified by law are too time-consuming to be managed by employees who have national service only as a collateral duty In cases of environmental sites, each crew of ten participants will have an employee working full time as a crew leader."

Unfortunately, despite this request, most NRCS environmental sites are in fact managed by NRCS employees for whom AmeriCorps is only one of many collateral duties. This has created specific and serious problems at sites:

In Boston, AmeriCorps Members have taken it upon themselves to call CNCS to complain that they do not have sufficient service projects on a daily basis, that they are worried that they may not be able to performed their required 1,700 hours of service, that they do not like or respect their daily supervisor who works for a partner organization, and that the NRCS project manager works in another part of the state

and only infrequently visits the site. These problems exist despite the fact that CNCS and the Department allowed NRCS to begin the Boston project months after the original launch date specifically so such problems could be rectified before the project began. CNCS is highly critical of USDA for not adequately responding to their numerous complaints about serious problems at this site. In my opinion, such problems can only be rectified if NRCS provides at least one full-time employee, who is actually based in Boston, to oversee this process.

In DC and Maryland, the Members have unclear community service objectives and only vague accomplishments detailed in their first quarter report.

In East St. Louis, the project was unable to recruit Members that adequately reflect the socio-economic diversity of the St. Louis area.

In Atlanta, some few Members are highly upset --- and complained to both myself and the Georgia state commission on community service --- that the project has not made sufficient attempts to reduce lengthy commutes to work sites and that the project, which is based mostly in the suburbs, has not made sufficient attempts to plan service projects in "inner city" Atlanta. In addition, despite the Environmental Team requirement that each crew have at least ten Members, some of the Members work on a daily basis in groups of only two. In addition, the project has vague objectives for its recycling project.

In Chicago, Member morale was significantly diminished by a long delay before the Members received their basic, introductory orientation. In addition, the comments made by the project manager in the first quarter report concern me because the project manager seems to believe that AmeriCorps is primarily a job training program and that it is positive that many Members have left the program to obtain other employment. In my view and CNCS's view, such attrition is a serious problem, not evidence of success.

In New Jersey, after a partnership with Union County fell through, Members were placed throughout the state in sites and projects never approved by either my office or CNCS. Members do not have the proper tools and the sites had great difficulty in recruitment. They are now engaged in some activities --- such as helping staff a visitor center in a beach resort during the Winter months --- that are questionable for AmeriCorps Members.

Problems with Environmental Team Project Designs

Some Environmental Teams have been, in effect, changed to Rural Development Teams without making adequate program design changes and without approving those changes with my office or with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The New Jersey project, which was originally supposed to have thirty Members serving together in three, 10-Member crews, now has 25 different Members working in 13 different counties. The Member working alone in Mt. Holly is roughly 20 miles away from the nearest other Member in Hamilton Square. As far as I can determine, these Members are not conducting the hands-on, physical conservation work required by our Environmental Team project design.

In South Dakota, Environmental Team Members are performing office-based technical work more applicable to the Rural Development Team than the Environmental Team. This is a problem not only because it is out of sync with our application to NRCS, but the South Dakota AmeriCorps Members are, in effect, being paid half the salary of Members in neighboring states performing almost identical service.

Lack of Flood-Relief Service in Flood States

Some states which received Members to specifically support flood-relief work in the areas damaged by the Midwest Flood of 1993 are engaging Members in service that has virtually no connection to that flood.

This reality can be very embarrassing to the Department and to AmeriCorps as a whole since we have repeatedly told Congress, the media, and the public that the Members in these states are engaged in flood relief. Outsiders, such as the author of a well-reviewed book on the National Service Act, have praised our flood relief projects as some of the most important work to be conducted by all of AmeriCorps.

Still, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and North Dakota -- also of which received Members to perform only flood relief work --- reported virtually no direct flood relief activities in their first quarter reports. Additionally, even though many Minnesota Members were supposed to be engaged in flood relief, the Minnesota first quarter report includes no description at all of any flood relief work.

Rural Development Team Members Focusing on Paperwork

Some Rural Development Team Members are spending the bulk of their service year performing routine paper work in offices.

A Member based in Emporia, Kansas personally told me that he spent about 95% of his time filling-out paper work in the office.

A Member at University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff spent the first quarter only cataloguing information on a computer. The Member wrote: "There was no media coverage on my project. My project is not the type that attracts media attention."

Rural Development Members Duplicating Work of Employees

Some Rural Development Team Members are performing work that may violate the provisions of the National and Community Service's Act that prohibit AmeriCorps Members from duplicating the work of existing employees of government agencies or other sponsoring organizations.

Members in South Dakota are performing work so similar to routine NRCS work -- digitalizing soil surveys --- that Senator Daschle complained personally to his State Director, who complained to me. The Senator reportedly said, "That isn't the AmeriCorps program I voted for."

Members in Apple Valley, California are focusing their year on soil surveys.

Members in Kansas are spending a great deal of their time on paperwork related to wetlands determinations.

Members in Wisconsin are apparently spending all their time digitalizing soil surveys. In the first quarter, they received no training external to their offices and performed no services directly in communities.

I MUST STRESS THAT THE PROBLEM ISN'T THAT MEMBERS ARE SPENDING SOME OF THEIR TIME DETERMINING WETLANDS OR DIGITALIZING SOIL INFORMATION, BUT THAT THE MEMBERS ARE SPENDING THEIR WHOLE SERVICE YEAR ON SUCH PROJECTS, WORKING MOSTLY AT DESKS IN NRCS OFFICES AND HAVING LITTLE CONTACT WITH THE PUBLIC.

SUCH SERVICE ALWAYS NEEDS TO BE PART OF AN OVERALL STRATEGIC PLAN THAT WILL ENSURE A COMMUNITY BENEFIT FOR THE WORK, NOT JUST A BENEFIT TO USDA.

If all NRCS projects more directly met your vision of rotating Members through a wide variety of tasks and directly meeting with land owners frequently, we would have far fewer problems.

Some Members Do Not Understand the AmeriCorps Vision

Some Rural Development Team Members do not seem to understand the AmeriCorps vision and believe they are in a regular, professional job.

Wrote one Member in Maine in his first quarter report: "I have been disappointed by the Mickey Mouse Club -- 'rah rah for us' aspect of AmeriCorps. I am a professional marine scientist and I expect to be treated as one. Singing silly songs is demeaning and I do not believe such activities are necessary for 'team spirit.' Thankfully, this aspect has not been emphasized, at least not in my cluster group."

We need to consistently explain that AmeriCorps is neither a jobs program nor a career development program, but rather it is a service program like the Peace Corps.

Site Objectives and Accomplishments Too Vague

Some sites still have community service objectives or first quarter report accomplishments that are too vague to defend to Congress, the media, or the general public. In many cases, it is unclear how the service the Members are performing will directly improve the surrounding communities.

In South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, it is unclear how the work the Members are performing will directly improve local conservation practices.

In Maine, it is unclear how the Casco Bay inventory will actually impact upon land-use changes. The Lakes projects objectives are extremely diffuse. In Houlton, it is unclear how the preparation of a report will lead to a cleaner lake.

In Highlands, Virginia, there are virtually no clear objectives for the Member.

In Tennessee, it is unclear how the Clinch-Powell project will move from studying tourism to actually increasing it. In Middle Tennessee, it is unclear how their recycling program will be implemented or how they will judge the effectiveness of their environmental education. In Chicahaw-Siloh, it is also unclear how the environmental education efforts will be measured. In Waverly, the objectives are vague and it seems like NRCS has provided little oversight to the sub-grantee.

In Arkansas, the objectives are very vague in Batesville, Holly Grove, Marion, and Helena. In Pine Bluff, Members are working on youth development issues such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and peer pressures, but it is unclear whether this kind of service meets the NRCS mission and can thus be legally funded by your agency.

In Mississippi, objectives are unclear in Brookhaven, Liberty, Monitcello, and Tupelo. The first quarter report for New Albany says virtually nothing concrete.

In Grant's Pass, Oregon, Members are working to explain riparian projects to local landowners and are encouraging their participation in stream enhancement program, but it is unclear what they actually accomplished in the first quarter.

Not Enough Funding for Required Functions

Some projects do not have enough funding to adequately support project work, Member training, or Member travel.

In Maine, Members in Machias were not funded or supported by the Conservation Districts, as promised.

In Mississippi, our Members in Tupelo have told CNCS that, although they are spending their year trying to plan for fire hydrants, because the money does not exist to create the hydrants, their service may be useless.

In Holly Grove, Arkansas, Members are worried that they will not be able to obtain funds adequate to re-locate flood victims.

In Oregon, an embarrassing article ran about our project in a local newspaper because the Members did not have enough funds for travel.

Members Meet Each Other Too Infrequently

Some states ignored the "clustering" requirements of the Rural Development Team and thus have made it difficult for Members to meet together regularly. For instance, Mississippi placed only two Members in North-Central Mississippi --- far from the NRCS Members in the Delta --- and thus did not abide by the requirement that all Members be located in groups of no less than five who are within a fifty mile or one hour drive of a central meeting point.

One Member in Maine complained about "Feeling alone, I wish I had someone to bounce ideas off on a daily basis." Another Member in Maine complained about isolation and not having promised weekly meetings, but instead meeting other Members only once every two months.

It is critical for Member morale and the AmeriCorps vision to ensure that Members interact with each other regularly.

Members Improperly Performing Public Affairs Duties

Some Members seems to be improperly spending the bulk of the service year focusing on public affairs activities.

It has been the view of all recent Secretaries of Agriculture and all recent Congresses --- both Democratic and Republican --- that USDA has too many -- not too few -- public affairs staff. Still, many NRCS projects have proposed utilizing AmeriCorps Members for full-time public affairs work, despite the fact that almost every NRCS state office already has a public affairs specialist. Although both my office and CNCS has repeatedly made it clear that this type of work is absolutely unacceptable, some states have still utilized Members in this manner.

Please see the attached activity report from a Member in Virginia, Audrey Biggs, who was apparently asked by NRCS to spend the bulk of her first quarter on "media lists, mail outs, press releases, news articles, and newsletters." While AmeriCorps Members may spend a small portion of their time on such activities, we must immediately end their practice of using Members primarily for this type of work.

Some Members in South Dakota and Arizona also appear to be spending their entire year on public affairs activities.

Inaccurate Information Disseminated to the Media

Many sites have disseminated inaccurate information about AmeriCorps to the public because they ignored the Department's requirement that all AmeriCorps press releases be approved in advance by the USDA Office of Communications.

Worse, I believe some of your staff in Washington have actually actively encouraged the field to ignore the Department's policy.

This is not just a academic or theoretical discussion over authority --- the following are some of the serious problems that have already occurred in NRCS press releases or other materials distributed to the media:

A) Inaccuracies in describing the amount of USDA's or the Corporation for National Service's funding;

- B) Inaccuracies describing USDA's role in AmeriCorps;
- C) Descriptions stating that AmeriCorps Members are doing routine paperwork in the office, which violates the "direct service" regulations of AmeriCorps;
- D) Descriptions implying that AmeriCorps Members are actually employees of NRCS (this is not only illegal, but politically devastating --- one such headline, appearing in the Marshall, Missouri *News Democrat*, read "AmeriCorps Worker to Join SCS Office Staff);"
- E) Poorly worded descriptions that can easily be taken out of context and thus severely harm the program; for example, a release in Minnesota resulted in a headline implying that AmeriCorps members were spending much of their time "watching a video;"
- F) Descriptions which wrongly state the role of project sponsors, thus placing non-profit groups at risk of having to produce thousands of dollars of matching funds;
- G) Press releases which focus solely on the television coverage of a project --- such releases are highly offensive to print or radio reporters;
- I) Press releases which are unprofessionally written or formatted --- for example, a two-page release listed fairly inconsequential activities and events and finally mentioned the actual newsworthy event in only the last two paragraphs;
- J) Press releases that do not mention the Department of Agriculture;
- K) and, press releases that do not mention AmeriCorps.

These problems are widespread and consistent --- and all could have been avoided if the field offices simply follow Departmental policy by giving us just a few hours to review them. Every time such inaccurate stories appear in public, the entire program is at risk.

I am fully aware that our policy of prior press release approval is controversial, but here are the reasons we have such a policy:

* When the Corporation for National and Community Service or the White House call to complain about media as a result of these incorrect or unprofessional releases, they complain to my office, not to local project managers. As the person delegated by the President to direct USDA's AmeriCorps program, it is ultimately my responsibility to prevent incorrect information such as the information listed above from being released by the Department about this Presidential initiative.

* Coordination at the Departmental level is the only way to avoid duplicative and conflicting information being disseminated by the 11 different USDA agencies --- in five different Under and Assistant Secretary mission areas --- involved in managing the USDA AmeriCorps program. When Acting Secretary Rominger recently visited with USDA AmeriCorps Members in Southern California, both NRCS and FS ignored our policy on press release approval and thus, without my office's knowledge, the Department ended up issuing three separate and uncoordinated releases on the event -- one by the Department, one by NRCS, and one by the FS. As a result, the information between the three releases was confusing and somewhat contradictory, thereby fueling the false perception by the media, Congress, and the public that USDA is a fat and bloated bureaucracy with overlapping agencies who do not even communicate with each other.

* The Department's review policy long pre-dates AmeriCorps and includes all Presidential and Secretarial initiatives --- not just AmeriCorps.

* Given that all press releases need to be approved by someone, somewhere within the bureaucracy, it stands to reason that they should be approved by the people with both the greatest knowledge of the program and the most extensive experience in dealing with the media.

* The Departmental approval process takes less time, not more time, than the usual agency approval process.

* The Departments' media policy represents the best of reinventing government because it allows Washington and the field to interact more freely and more closely without being bogged down by five levels of intervening bureaucracy.

* Press releases are often the only way my office has of learning of policy changes or operating difficulties across the country.

* All other USDA agencies except NRCS have embraced -- or at least accepted and followed -- this policy.

* In the future, when the AmeriCorps program is institutionalized at all levels of USDA and when all our key staff are trained on the AmeriCorps vision and program design, such a policy may no longer be needed. Dave White is an excellent choice to head the NRCS communications efforts. He is not only experienced and energetic, but he has significant experience dealing with AmeriCorps. I will work closely with him to expand the NRCS involvement at the Washington, state, and field levels in all our communications efforts. However, for the remainder of this year, the stakes are just too high for the President and for the fate of the program to continue to look the other way as inaccurate information about the program is released throughout the country. For now, I hope you will understand why it is critical for all your staff to abide by and enforce this policy.

Conclusion

While most NRCS AmeriCorps projects are going great, I need you help to strengthen your agency's efforts to bring stringent quality control standards to all your projects.

I want to once again stress that both Paula and Dee are doing great jobs, are widely respected by the project managers in the field, and are working their tails off for AmeriCorps. However, they do not have the time, resources, or the rank within NRCS to fix all the problems enumerated above. They need help.

With an extra push on both of our parts, we can ensure that, not only is AmeriCorps not eliminated this year, but that it expands and eventually becomes a rite of passage for all American youth.

I thank you once again for all your extraordinary support.

CC: LLoyd Wright, Paula Cole Jones, Dee DeFiore

DRAFT

March 6, 1995

To: USDA AmeriCorps Project Managers and Facilitators

From: Joel Berg, Director of National Service, USDA
Paula Cole Jones
Lou Woltering,
David Gibson,
Jim Coyle,
Larry Winston,
Charles Simms,
Donna Hines,

Subject: Primary Challenges Identified in Our First Quarter Reports

We have now had the opportunity to thoroughly review all your quarterly reports. All of you should soon be receiving copies of our summary of those reports that was submitted to the Corporation for National and Community Service. It is clear that the program is going incredibly well after only few months of operation, and that all of you are to be congratulated heartily for helping build USDA/AmeriCorps projects that are "Getting Things Done" in a highly impressive fashion throughout the country.

However, we also asked you to provide an honest assessment of the challenges, difficulties, and problems you faced --- and most of you responded frankly and thoughtfully. It is important for you to know that our request for such information was not pro-forma; in fact, we believe such insight is absolutely vital to our efforts at Total Quality Management and continuous improvement of AmeriCorps.

The following quote from Corporation for National and Community Service Chief Executive Officer Eli J. Segal is appropriate to this process:

"In AmeriCorps, the only forgivable sin should be complacency. If one manager says, 'Everything's going great' and the second says 'here's two problems and here's how we want to fix them,' I will go with the second every time."

Therefore, summarized below are your most-frequently cited challenges. They are broken down --- in order of frequency mentioned --- by issues that primarily need to be dealt with by either the Corporation for National and Community Service, by USDA here at the Washington level, or by you and your Members at the local and state level. Of course, almost all the challenges need to be addressed by all three levels of management. In each case, we have provided a few word description of the problem cited, a number representing how many reports cited this as a problem, and, most importantly, a brief description of how we may be able to address the problem. In all cases where we are changing or clarifying policy, those changes or clarifications will be reflected in the revised operations manual which will be sent to you shortly.

Corporation for National and Community Service Issues

Issue

Number of times cited

Members have no uniforms or improper uniforms

16

We are now working to provide every site with at least one AmeriCorps button per Member so that every Member --- including Rural Development Team Members --- can always wear at least one item at all times identifying them with AmeriCorps. We are also working closely with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to provide one set of tee-shirts and sweatshirts to every site that has not yet received them. We will be deciding in the next two weeks whether the Department will, this year, print its own USDA/AmeriCorps tee-shirts for Environmental Team Members and polo shirts for Rural Development Team Members. For next year, we will work closely with project managers and the Corporation for National and Community Service to build into each site's budget funds for a complete set of uniforms that are clearly identify as both AmeriCorps and USDA, and are appropriate for the weather endured and type of service performed by each AmeriCorps Member.

Difficulty obtaining child care

11

Child care is a difficult problem that vexes not only AmeriCorps, but most social programs. However, we are continuing to work closely with CNCS to resolve individual child care problems. Please inform us immediately on any specific problems you may have in this regard. Also, please provide any suggestions how either the law or the regulations of CNCS can be modified to improve the delivery of child care services for eligible Members.

Confusion about health care benefits

3

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about who qualifies for health care benefits and what exact benefits they can expect --- we will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well.

Confusion about child care eligibility

2

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about who qualifies for child care benefits and what exact benefits they can expect --- we will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well.

Lack of AmeriCorps signs

2

USDA will work to obtain more signs from NRCS and distribute them to the field. If we have additional funds, we will also print Departmental signs. At your request, we can also provide information how you can procure, out of your project budget, magnetic AmeriCorps signs for the sides of your vehicles.

Six week replacement rule

2

Responding to a great amount of input from many AmeriCorps projects, CNCS modified the "six week replacement rule," to allow some back-filling of vacant positions as long as the vacancies are filled at the same time to create new "classes" of Members. Please refer to the January 25, 1995 memorandum on this matter from Dianna Rodriguez Algra of CNCS that should have previously been sent to you.

Confusion about what benefits are taxed

2

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about what benefits -- including the educational voucher -- are subject to taxes. We will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well. To change this would require Congress to amend the law to specifically exempt the educational voucher from Federal incomes taxes, but it is unclear whether the current Congress would support such an amendment.

Confusion About Private Loan Forgiveness

2

USDA will be much more specific in all our recruitment materials about exactly which education loans can be forgiven --- we will urge CNCS to clarify this matter in their recruitment materials as well.

USDA Washington Office IssuesIssueNumber of times citedMembers have no access to computers

15

RECD is now making a concerted attempt to provide computers -- and Internet connections --- to most of their Rural Development Team Members. The Department will continue to work with agencies to obtain surplus computers --- or at least frequent access to computers --- for our AmeriCorps members. However, in this time of scarce resources, it is impossible for us to guarantee at this time that all our Members will have computers, particularly given that some USDA employees still do not have their own computers.

Difficulty in recruitment/short time frames

8

We are committed to providing a longer recruitment time-frame this year than last year for all our sites. While we can not officially offer positions to Members for next year until our application for renewal to CNCS is approved in June, but you can certainly began informal recruitment efforts for next year. Until we have a revised Member application approved by OMB, you can ask applicants to fill out last year's application.

Not enough time to prepare reports/paperwork

6

We realize that we originally placed a tremendous reporting burden on you with very short turn-around times. To redress this problem we'll offer you a deal: since we have now specified all the major reports and forms due to us for the remainder of the project year, we hope you will have adequate time to prepare them and thus make it a priority to submit them on deadline. We have also tried to ease your burden by providing sample reports --- the sample first quarter report was less than three pages long. Next year, before the start of the program, will provide a report schedule for the entire year.

Members not used to Federal government

6

We recommend that all Member training programs focus heavily on helping Members understand the unique environment they are about to enter and the special rules and regulations they will have to follow.

Not enough budget for travel

5

We will take special care to work with all applicants for next year to ensure that you have adequate funds in your original proposal to meet realistic travel needs.

Lack of or difficulty obtaining equipment

5

We will take special care to work with all applicants for next year to ensure that you have adequate funds in your original proposal to meet realistic equipment needs. We will also provide project managers with information about how they may be able to obtain surplus equipment from the Defense Department.

Members want more cluster time/with other Members

5

Although three project managers cited below said their Members spend too much time in required cluster meetings, five different quarterly reports filed by Members themselves stated they spent far too little time in cluster meetings or with other Members. One reality of AmeriCorps is that the goal of "getting things done" is sometimes in conflict with the other goals of "building community, opportunity, and responsibility." We will continue to work with project managers, facilitators, and Members to obtain feedback on ways to best build an AmeriCorps identity and provide constant support and reinforcement for Members without significantly decreasing the amount of quality service performed. One way to deal with this dilemma is to use cluster meetings for joint service and/or training activities that also "get things done," rather than just static meetings in offices. We are anxious to hear reports from the field how project managers, facilitators, and Members have successfully balanced all the multiple missions of AmeriCorps. We will grant wide latitude to project managers and facilitators to utilize a great variety of clustering methods that advance the AmeriCorps vision. However, we can not accept project managers simply ignoring the cluster meeting requirements without providing an adequate alternative. In addition, next year the Department will be stricter in refusing to approve applications for Rural Development Team projects that do not meet the cluster requirement of having a group of no fewer than five Members within a fifty mile or one hour drive of a central meeting point.

Lack of funding for project work5

Many projects complained that, while their agencies may have given them money to support the Members themselves, the agency did not give them money for actual work projects, such as conservation measure installations, home renovation, and dry fire hydrants placements. It is critical that our projects have funds to pay for these projects -- or the Members may be wasting their time planning projects that will never be implemented. Thus, such funding should be built into all applications for next year -- to be provided either by the agency or by partners.

Too much time preparing reports3

The formats and samples we have provided for reports should now make it clearer than ever that we are always asking for very brief and concise reports that state the key facts in plain, non-technical, language. Furthermore, facilitators should be able to help project managers prepare these reports.

Project managers say too much cluster time3

See response above to Members who reported that they want more time in clusters.

Communication between state office and field3

The agencies and the AmeriCorps facilitators will double their efforts in making sure our on-site project managers receive critical information as quickly as possible.

Member Want to Talk to Other Members Nationally2

We will provide a complete site list for all project managers and Members --- along with a brief description of the service performed at that site --- so Members on their own can either individually call or arrange cluster conference calls with other sites around the country. In addition, Facilitators will be increasing their efforts to set-up such calls. Lastly, we are investigating the possibility of holding a teleconference in the near future for all USDA project sites.

Need training about all USDA agencies

2

We encourage all project managers to teach Members --- preferably in the initial orientation --- about the functions all major USDA agencies, not just the particularly agency sponsoring that project.

AmeriCorps vision at odds with agency mission

1

Confusion over competing missions can be clarified with more specific agreements over the original applications, the community service objectives, and the work plans.

Liability and Workmen's Compensation Confusion

1

These issues will be clarified in our revised operations manual.

Not enough budget for training

1

We encourage you to create new partnerships with other entities --- such as your state Extension Service or state Commission on National Service --- to provide training. In addition, we will take special care to work with all applicants for next year to ensure that you have adequate funds in your original proposal to meet realistic training needs.

Payroll not flexible enough

1

We are working with the National Finance Center, which processes USDA AmeriCorps paychecks, to determine whether next year our payroll system can be more flexible to accommodate the varied work schedules and cash-flow needs of our Members.

Lack of stationary

1

Within the next two weeks, we will provide project managers with a new USDA/AmeriCorps logo on slicks and/or on computer diskettes for you to create your own stationary. If our funding permits, we will attempt to print stationary Departmentally and send it to project sites.

Local Project Manager/Facilitator/Member IssuesIssueNumber of times citedMembers need computer training12

We suggest project managers make special efforts to partner with local educational institutions to provide computer training for Members. Perhaps members could do a one day service project at an educational site in exchange for such training. At a minimum, project managers should be able to provide easy-to-understand "how to" books for Members about the software they are using.

Problems in RD with partners lack of interest/trust12

The Rural Development Team Member training in Memphis the week of March 20 will focus heavily of developing ways to build community trust and support for our projects. We urge Members or project staff who have been having particular difficulties in this area to try to attend this training. We will also work to develop long-term written materials on this topic.

Need grant writing training6

First, we believe it is important to clarify that no USDA AmeriCorps Member should be spending the bulk of his or her service year simply writing grants. However, project managers may want to consult with local educational institutions or consultants about obtaining grant writing training for members who need to spend a small part of their time writing grant applications as part of their overall work plan.

No phones and/or desks for Members5

Every Rural Development Team Member should have a desk or phone available for them the day they start their service. Given our much longer time frames for next year, we should be able to make this a reality. This may require early and intensive planning by sites as soon as they learn in June that they will be receiving members that will start in September.

Members unclear of what of what to do

5

It is our legal responsibility to ensure that all our Members have a clear understanding each day of the service that they are expected to perform that day. This should be clarified by matching-up clearly defined community service objectives with clearly-defined weekly workplans.

Work ethic of Members/difficulty with diverse Members

5

Project managers and facilitators need to spend a great deal of personal time with all Members in order to help them function as a diverse and effective team working hard each and every day. In truth, our AmeriCorps staff need to be a combination of the following on different occasion: boss, surrogate parent, friend, mentor, peer, social worker, and disciplinarian. While Members should not be "coddled" and inappropriate behavior should never be tolerated, USDA staff should go to great lengths to be especially sensitive to generational, gender, racial, and disability issues. Our future staff trainings will focus on these issues. In the meantime, we can provide project managers with outside facilitators trained in these issues to help with particular problems; if you need such help, please inform us immediately. In addition, by improving recruitment for next year, we can ensure that all prospective Members are given a clear idea of the difficulties and benefits of the service they will performing; increasing the number of diverse applications and thus increasing our recruitment selectivity is one of the best ways to build teams that perform well.

Lack of support from offices/doing grunt work

5

No AmeriCorps Member should every be placed in an office without the full support of that office's supervisor. No member should every be asked to spend the bulk of their service year performing "grunt work" such as filing, sending mass mailings, shredding documents, answering phones, making copies, filling out forms, getting snacks for meeting, etc. It is the responsibility of project mangers to ensure that Members are continually implementing community service projects that meet critical local needs and are above and beyond the routine work of sponsoring organization.

Members dropping out to obtain other employment

4

Even though the "six-week replacement" rule has been modified to allow agencies to back-fill on a selected basis when there are vacancies, it is still critical to reduce turnover as much as possible. One of the ways to do so is to improve the recruitment process, as suggested above. Also, during recruitment and throughout the program,

it should be stressed that the members are performing national service, are not working at a job, and are fully expected to fulfill their 1,700 commitment to the nation. It should also be continually stressed that Members will not receive pro-rated educational awards if they simply leave the program. However, if your project has a particularly high attrition rate, there are probably some structural problems with your projects that you should discuss with us.

Supervision too time-costly

3

We understand that AmeriCorps management and supervisory functions have taken much more staff time than you or your supervisors ever anticipated, but we hope all our field staff agree that the productive service performed by the Members has more than made up for the resources placed in the program by your agency. The fact remains that all AmeriCorps Members --- no matter their service tasks or their educational backgrounds --- need continual support and supervision. Facilitators should be asked to help with select tasks. If project a manager is unable to provide such support either personally, by assigning other staff to the task, or by obtaining partners that can provide that support, the manager should apply for fewer, or no, Members next year.

Weather conditions prevent planned work

3

We highly recommend that each site engaged in outdoors activities build-in contingency plans for the weather into all their workplans. We would be glad to provide you with examples of alterative activities engaged in by other sites during times of poor weather.

Not enough supervision

3

It is important that we work together to make sure Members get the supervision they need. See above sections on "Members Unclear of What to Do" and "Supervision Too Time-Costly."

Turnover in local elected officials

2

While rapid change is --- depending on your personal point of view ---- an either fortunate or unfortunate reality of our political system, Members can mitigate their dependence on rapidly-changing political leaders by also building partnerships with non-governmental entities locally.

Members not getting critical information from office 2

We encourage project managers to at least briefly review all the materials we send you, and then ensure that the Members themselves get as much of this information that you believe they would want or would help them better perform their service.

Lack of local interest after not getting EZ or EC designation 2

The Rural Development Team Member training in Memphis the week of March 20 will provide some guidance on this problem.

Transportation to job site/lack of vehicles 2

We are attempting to develop a way to work with the General Services Administration to ease our ability to lease government vehicles.

Lack of orientation for Members 1

All Members should receive training up-front in the AmeriCorps program design and visions, as well as the specific technical techniques they will need to perform their service. Our next general staff training will focus on proven orientation techniques.

Members not used to residential camp 1

We encourage recruiters to attempt to give applicants the greatest possible sense of camp life in a residential program before they are selected.

Supervisor too far away from Members 1

Where project managers are physically separated from the Members by significant distances, we encourage the managers to overcompensate by travelling to the actual site frequently, by working with other potential supervisors closer to the site, and by speaking with the Members regularly by phone. Facilitators should also be asked to help with select tasks.

DRAFT

12

Personal Leave Time is Not enough

1

The personal leave granted to Members is similar to the amount of time given to new USDA employees.

Lack of flexibility on number of Members in state

1

In applying for projects next year, we encourage states to consider very carefully exactly how many Members their projects will require -- and exactly how many Members they can properly manage --- since it is very difficult for the Department to later change the number in states.

USDA employees resent AmeriCorps

1

We will work with project managers to better communicate to all USDA employees the benefits and results of AmeriCorps, constantly stressing that AmeriCorps Members are not Federal employees and are not performing tasks normally performed by Federal employees. We strongly encourage project managers to immediately introduce new AmeriCorps Members to all USDA employees working in a given office.

Friction integrating with pre-existing youth corps

1

We must all make a special effort to ensure that the cooperative agreements we sign with youth corps specifically delineate the duties and responsibilities of all entities involved in managing the program.

We hope this process responding to your challenges helps you better understand how we in Washington are dedicated to continually obtaining your feedback to improve this program, based on constant and serious self-assessment. We hope you will come to realize that not only are we sincere when we asked for criticism, but that we actually act upon your advice. This process has provided us all with concrete ways we can do better.

Thank you once again for your role in building AmeriCorps and writing a vital new chapter in American history.

CC: Corporation for National Service

March 1, 1995

To: Tom Hebert
From: Joel Berg JB
Subject: Department's AmeriCorps Media Policy

I fully understand your strong concerns about our press release approval process for AmeriCorps. However, I hope that once you are made aware of all the facts in this regard, you will agree that, not is our current policy the only practical option in this first year of a complex Presidential initiative, but that the media policy we are implementing is a model of reinventing government.

My response is lengthy --- and hopefully substantive --- both because your note made it clear you feel strongly about this issue and because I believe this question is basic to the very survival of our AmeriCorps program.

1) Coordination at the Departmental level is the only way to avoid duplicative and conflicting information being disseminated by the 11 different USDA agencies --- in five different Under and Assistant Secretary mission areas --- involved in managing the USDA AmeriCorps program.

When Acting Secretary Rominger recently visited with USDA AmeriCorps Members in Southern California, both NRCS and FS ignored our policy on press release approval and thus, without my office's knowledge, the Department ended up issuing three separate and uncoordinated releases on the event --- one by the Department, one by NRCS, and one by the FS. As a result, the information between the three releases was confusing and somewhat contradictory, thereby fueling the false perception by the media, Congress, and the public that USDA is a fat and bloated bureaucracy with overlapping agencies who do not even communicate with each other.

In 21 of the states in which NRCS has AmeriCorps projects this year, other USDA agencies are also sponsoring projects --- sometimes in the same counties. When agency project managers in those states violate Department policy by putting out-agency specific releases, they only confuse the public further about the AmeriCorps. Given that eleven different USDA agencies --- NRCS, FS, FCS, RHCDS, RBCDS, CFSA, RUS, ARS, CREES, AMS, and FSIS --- are involved, the only possible way to coordinate media is at a Departmental level.

2) The Department's review policy long pre-dates AmeriCorps and includes all Presidential and Secretarial initiatives --- not just AmeriCorps.

Former Secretary Espy, Acting Secretary Rominger, and Secretary-Designate Glickman all have expressed a desire for the Department to communicate in a unified manner as one Department --- not as 30 separate agencies.

Consequently, releases relating to Departmental or Presidential initiatives --- such as the Northwest Forest Plan or the President's budget --- always have to be approved at the Departmental level. Thus, the policy that the program is operating under is neither new nor is it unique to AmeriCorps.

Both Ali Webb and Tom Amontree fully support the Department's policy. In addition, Eli Segal, Special Assistant to President Clinton and Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community desire has expressed his strong desire that USDA deliver one, coordinated AmeriCorps message through my office.

3) Given that all press releases need to be approved by someone, somewhere within the bureaucracy, it stands to reason that they should be approved by the people with both the greatest knowledge of the program and the most extensive experience in dealing with the media.

The question is not whether or not a press releases have to be approved --- because all USDA press releases are obviously approved by someone somewhere. The question is whether the releases will be approved by people with extensive media experience and with a full understanding of the AmeriCorps program, or whether they will be often approved by people who have little or no media experience and sometimes limited knowledge of the AmeriCorps program. In fact, many of the releases are prepared by AmeriCorps members themselves.

Many of the people now writing and approving press releases on the field level have never received formal training in either communications or AmeriCorps.

In my view, reinventing government does not dictate that we simply devolve each and every one of our functions to the lowest possible level; if that was the case, we would close down shop here in Washington and let county planning agencies be in charge of all wetlands determinations on agricultural land. Rather, reinventing government requires that each level of government do what it can do best and allow local levels of government to what they can do best.

I respect the professional judgment of your Project Managers relating to conservation programs --- I hope they would respect our professional judgement relating to media policies.

4) The Departmental approval process takes less time, not more time, than the usual agency approval process.

I absolutely agree with your concern that press releases not be delayed. However, the fact is that my office has promised a 24 turn-around time for all press releases, and --- for the six months since we originally made that promise --- we have kept our word and have usually approved or modified releases within a few hours.

It is simply incorrect for some in NRCS to now claiming that my office is holding up press releases. The reality is that my office approves press releases much more quickly than such releases are usually approved at the field level.

5) Despite our year's worth of attempts to work with NRCS to set-up the "appropriate controls and reporting system" such as you suggest, NRCS has often ignored Departmental policy and has consequently distributed many press releases containing inaccurate information.

The following are some of the problems that have already occurred in NRCS press releases or other materials distributed to the media:

A) Inaccuracies in describing the amount of USDA's or the Corporation for National Service's funding;

B) Inaccuracies describing USDA's role in AmeriCorps;

C) Descriptions stating that AmeriCorps Members are doing routine paperwork in the office, which violates the "direct service" regulations of AmeriCorps;

D) Descriptions implying that AmeriCorps Members are actually employees of NRCS (this is not only illegal, but politically devastating --- one such headline, appearing in the Marshall, Missouri *News Democrat*, read "AmeriCorps Worker to Join SCS Office Staff);"

E) Poorly worded descriptions that can easily be taken out of context and thus severely harm the program; for example, a release in Minnesota resulted in a headline implying that AmeriCorps members were spending much of their time "watching a video;"

F) Descriptions which wrongly state the role of project sponsors, thus placing non-profit groups at risk of having to produce thousands of dollars of matching funds;

G) Press releases which focus solely on the television coverage of a project --- such releases are highly offensive to print or radio reporters;

I) Press releases which are unprofessionally written or formatted --- for example, a two-page release listed fairly inconsequential activities and events and finally mentioned the actual newsworthy event in only the last two paragraphs;

J) Press releases that do not mention the Department of Agriculture;

K) and, Press releases that do not mention AmeriCorps.

These problems are wide-spread and consistent --- and all could have been avoided if the field offices simply follow Departmental policy by giving us just a few hours to review them. Every time such inaccurate stories appear in public, entire program is at risk.

When the Corporation for National and Community Service or the White House call to complain about media as a result of these incorrect or unprofessional releases, they complain to my office, not to local project managers. As the person delegated by the President to direct USDA's AmeriCorps program, it is ultimately my responsibility to prevent incorrect information such as the information listed above from being released by the Department about this Presidential initiative.

6) The Departments' media policy represents the best of reinventing government because it allows Washington and the field to interact more freely and more closely without being bogged down by five levels of intervening bureaucracy.

The strongest opposition to this policy is not from rank-and-file NRCS project managers who have worked with me cooperatively for the last six months, but from mid-level Washington program managers in NRCS who resent someone from the Department "interfering" in their agency. In fact, one key member of the NRCS Washington staff told me that he flat-out told the field to ignore the Department's policy. While such insubordination against Departmental authority is troubling, it is even more troubling that some Washington staff are still willing to harpoon "Team USDA" in order just to protect one agency's turf, or one person's piece of that turf.

While Paul Johnson and some Members of his staff have been wildly supportive of AmeriCorps, some of his staff have been unwilling, or unable, to engage in detailed, substantive, review of their projects in which I have engaged. Instead of admitting they need more resources or time to oversee AmeriCorps, they simply use a distorted "reinventing government" argument to claim that media outreach is a local responsibility and is therefore beyond their oversight responsibility. As evidenced by all the above-listed media problems, their system has not worked.

This Department's policy is not "micro-managing," but is simply "steering" the program in one basic, unified, direction. Please refer to attached section of the USDA AmeriCorps operations manual entitled "National Media and Communications Policy," which, like the entire manual, was written in close consultation with all USDA agencies involved. As you will read, we are empowering, not micro-managing local project managers. We encourage them to write their own press releases, set up their own local media events, and conduct their own interviews. We generally require no prior notification before they speak with the local press. Our only three requirements are that we approve all press releases, are notified when major national media contact them, and are notified when negative stories are being prepared.

In the cases where field offices have abided by the Departmental policy, the system has worked well. Such a system --- in which project managers simply send a release to my office and then get it approved rapidly --- is, in fact, the most non-bureaucratic approach.

However, when releases have to go through the traditional chain of command and be approved by a District Conservationist, and/or an Area Conservationist, and/or a State Conservationist, the process often takes longer. I would suggest a policy that in which NRCS itself also has 24 hours to either approve a press release or let it go by without their approval.

7) Press releases are often the only way my office has of learning of policy changes or operating difficulties across the country.

Because agency staff in Washington often withhold critical information from my office, the press release approval process often is my best way of knowing when projects are straying from our previously-approved objectives. In one case --- when an NRCS employee in a state office *accidentally* contacted me about a release about to go out ---- I learned that the state was about to publicly announce totally new AmeriCorps projects in the state that had never been approved either by my office or the Corporation for National and Community Service.

As David Osborne wrote in *Reinventing Government*, "Programs are not self-correcting. When government programs fail, managers are often the last to know." Thus, I highly value any process at all through which I can learn about problems in our projects before its too late to correct those problems.

8) All other USDA agencies except NRCS have embraced -- or at least accepted and followed -- this policy.

NRCS is the only USDA agency involved in AmeriCorps that is continuing to fight --- and disregard --- the Department's policy. Just because a few employees refuse to meet their legal responsibilities to enact Departmental policy, that does not mean we should abandon sensible policies just to please them.

9) In the future, when the AmeriCorps program is institutionalized at all levels of USDA and when all our key staff are trained on the AmeriCorps vision and program design, such a policy may no longer be needed.

Dave White is an excellent choice to head the NRCS communications efforts. He is not only experienced and energetic, but he has significant experience dealing with AmeriCorps. I will work closely with him to expand the NRCS involvement at the Washington, state, and field levels in all our communications efforts.

However, for the remainder of this year, the stakes are just too high for the President and for the fate of the program to continue to look the other way as inaccurate information about the program is released throughout the country.

I hope this memorandum assuages your concerns and clarifies why I must insist on enforcement of the Department's policy. I hope I can count on your support in continuing to convey this to NRCS.

I would be more than happy to discuss this issue with you in person --- as well as other AmeriCorps issues facing NRCS --- at your convenience.

TOM HEBERT
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
USDA

February 14, 1995

TO: Joel Berg

RE: Ameri Corps Press Releases

Joel - your request to clear all press releases at the field/local level on Ameri Corps represents micro-managing at its worst. I am sorry to be blunt about this, but this is absolutely not what reinventing government is about. Not only will you engender enormous resentment among the people who are busting their butts at the field level to make this work, you will never be able to adequately respond to the workload in a timely manner -- and all of the good messages will stop.

We will be happy to work with you to set up the appropriate controls and reporting system to ensure that every public affairs officer or press contact is fully aware of, and in conformance with, the Department's and the Administration's message on Ameri Corps. The NRCS people are eager to do this. But you are going to have a revolt on your hands if you press this.

Let's talk.

