



Nebraska State Service Plan 2008-2009 Update

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2007-2008 Nebraska State Service Plan

(Originally submitted to the Corporation for National & Community Service on September 18, 2006)

Priorities

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission is dedicated to fulfilling its mission of mobilizing Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through collaboration, volunteering, and national service programming. The Commission's 2006-2010 Strategic Plan presents our priorities and goals. In implementing this plan we will maximize partnerships and increase our role in furthering the quality of life in Nebraska. Specific goals are:

Managerial Excellence

1. Implement Relevant *Benchmarks for Success*
 - Ensure strong staff and volunteer leadership through professional development
 - Continue to engage Commissioners with strong community roles and relationships
 - Maximize accountability among Commissioners
 - Enhance the relationship with the Governor's Office
2. Energize the Nebraska Volunteer Foundation
 - Provide leadership in securing alternative resources
 - Diversify revenue sources
 - Gain support from the corporate and foundation communities

Programmatic Distinction

1. Continue to Refine and Cement AmeriCorps Protocols – Solidify the Base
2. Support – Don't Duplicate – Volunteerism Efforts in Our State
3. Enhance Organizational Marketing & Branding Efforts
4. Engage Youth – Emphasize Collaboration with the University of Nebraska's Midwest Consortium for Service Learning in Higher Education
5. Engage "Baby Boomers"
6. Re-Engineer Approach to Trainings & Technical Assistance – Increase Intended Audiences and Diversify Approaches
7. Use Citizen Corps to Invigorate and Make Inroads into New Communities
8. Foster Unity in National Service in Nebraska – Citizen Corps ~ Senior Corps ~ Learn & Serve ~ AmeriCorps ~ VISTA ~ Disability

Staff and Commissioners, in concert with numerous partners, are making significant progress. In 2005, we successfully completed an audit by the Office of the Inspector General. In all endeavors we practice a philosophy of continual improvement. We also continually seek to involve more individuals in bettering their communities. In these efforts we are aligned with the Corporation's strategic initiatives of involving youth, baby boomers, and those in higher education as well as leveraging volunteer effort.

We are also aligned with Governor Heineman's vision for Nebraska which is based on four priorities: education, economic vitality, efficiency in government, and protecting families. We are in frequent contact with the Governor's office, state senators, and our national congressional delegation. We are fortunate that our First Lady consistently takes an active role in our activities in her role as Honorary Chair of the Commission.

We have refrained from imposing programmatic priorities on applicants for AmeriCorps support within Nebraska, preferring to allow local entities to define and meet the needs they see as most pressing. Our current portfolio of programming skews heavily towards the urban areas – predominately Lincoln and Omaha. We recognize the needs in these areas, but are invested in increasing awareness of the national service opportunities available in rural areas – particularly the vast western portion of our state.

We are very pleased to have diversity among the AmeriCorps members serving in Nebraska and are eager to expand the range of individuals in service. During 2006-2007 we made renewed efforts to engage individuals with disabilities through the creation of recruitment materials positively displaying those with disabilities

constructively assisting others. This emphasis will continue in 2007-2008 with increased efforts toward building a “Statewide Inclusion Team,” after the model developed by the National Service Inclusion Project.

To increase people’s abilities to help their neighbors, we have taken a leadership role in coordinating volunteer-based homeland security and disaster preparedness activities. We partner with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) by employing a program officer to implement the Citizen Corps Program in our ninety-three counties and are looked to by many – including Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy, Nebraska’s Director of Homeland Security – for leadership. This will grow in 2006-2007 as we have attained an AmeriCorps*VISTA member to focus on building and strengthening community networks and volunteer systems with an emphasis in western Nebraska to increase community preparedness efforts. The VISTA will assist local Citizen Corps Councils to use community expertise and engage vulnerable populations such as low-income, limited English speaking and individuals with disabilities into the local community disaster preparedness plan.

Also extending our reach and public profile, will be an increased role in promoting national days of service, including Family Volunteer Day, National Global and Youth Service Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Partnerships

We continually seek the guidance and assistance of others to complement and increase our abilities. Within the realm of national service, the Corporation’s State Office Director and the coordinator of K-12 service learning serve as ex-officio members of the Commission Board. For 2007-2008, we look to increase the role of the Director of the Midwest Consortium on Service Learning in Higher Education in our activities, trainings and annual Governor’s Conference.

We actively cultivate the support of our Governor and other public leaders. 2007-2008 marks the first time the Commission has received state general funds. We will strive to increase this initial investment of \$30,000.

The AmeriCorps programs in Nebraska are very strong and communicate honestly and openly with us. Their partnership in meeting community needs and accountability standards is stellar. As we move ahead, we are seeking creative ways to increase the portfolio of programming – especially in traditionally under-served areas such as rural and frontier western Nebraska. We also are placing a new emphasis on creatively assisting programs to attain true sustainability.

Nebraska features two Points of Light Volunteer Centers, both of which collaborate actively with us. Furthermore we partner and help coordinate a wealth of activity in the realm of volunteer-based homeland security and disaster preparedness efforts.

Corporation Assistance

We are appreciative of the open communication and consistent strong support of Corporation leadership and staff with whom we work. The following steps from the Corporation could strengthen our efforts:

- Continue the practice of prompt, open, honest communication;
- Investigate creative approaches to increasing revenues for “small states”, particularly as the Corporation gets more proficient at identifying and reallocating de-obligated funds; one possible approach could actively involve “small state” representatives in exploring creative methods to more equitably allocate resources;
- Re-organize the Corporation website to make information easier to find. The site contains a wealth of valuable information and tools but locating it can be an overwhelming challenge. The same challenge exists in attempts to use the search function for The Resource Center;
- Similarly, create a single web resource page for universal AmeriCorps-related downloadable forms, such as enrollment forms and waivers;
- Issue an updated version of the Program Director’s Handbook; and
- Formulate and disseminate WBRS/eGrants user’s guides. Also regularly conduct on-site or conference-based trainings for Training Officers to address concerns that arise from grantees.

Nebraska State Service Plan - 2008-2009 Update

PROGRESS TOWARD MEETING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Priorities

The Nebraska State Service Plan goals continue to focus on *Managerial Excellence* and *Programmatic Distinction*. We continue to strengthen our management and staffing at the same time expanding partnerships and our role in the Nebraska volunteer and service community to accomplish these two-pronged goal areas. By building a strong team through upgraded positions, we are able to retain and recruit highly qualified professional staff that continually enhance and refine the operations of the Commission to attain consistent managerial quality. Creatively seeking out collaborations, innovative ideas and quality practices underscores the rapid expansion of programming that is bringing new resources and partners to the volunteering and community service field and assure programmatic distinction in all efforts and funded programming. We are on target and ahead of schedule.

We are confident -- and have received consistent feedback and input -- that our practices and approaches are successful in promoting quality and assuring accountability. ServeNebraska, the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission, remains dedicated to fulfilling its mission of mobilizing Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through collaboration, volunteering, and national service programming. The Commission's 2006-2010 Strategic Plan remains in effect, concisely presenting our priorities and goals. In implementing this plan, we will maximize partnerships and increase our role in furthering the quality of life in Nebraska.

We were notified that we will be subject to a Corporation for National & Community Service Administrative Standards Review in August 2008. We are excited and welcome this federal review of our administrative operations and programs as an opportunity to document and demonstrate our quality. We have diligently developed a process to systematically prepare and build the needed documentation to support this Standards Review.

Staff and Commissioners, in concert with numerous partners, are making significant progress. In all endeavors we practice a philosophy of continual improvement and inclusion. As part of this process -- and to assure that the goals of the Commission remain relevant -- the Commissioners and staff will devote their October 2008 planning retreat to re-visiting the four-year Strategic Plan at its midpoint.

Progress Toward Meeting Priorities. Some of the developments in the Nebraska State Service Plan as originally envisioned in 2006-2007 that have seen significant progress include:

ADOPTED NEW BRAND NAME – SERVENEBRASKA. Adopted the new operational brand name of ServeNebraska to enhance awareness, expand visibility, and promote the significance of volunteering and community service. A new logo was developed and unveiled at the Commission's State Governor's Conference on Community Service along with a dramatically enhanced and restructured website. Additional collateral promotional materials and information will be developed as we grow into our new name.

NEGOTIATED A HOST SUPPORT AGENCY MOA. Negotiated and entered into a written memorandum of agreement with the Commission's host support agency - the Department of Health & Human Services to detail the support the agency would provide. Such a document has not existed for the Nebraska Commission and for the first time a Memorandum of Agreement was completed and signed during 2007. This MOA made it possible for the Nebraska Commission to secure participation in the DHHS cost allocation pool and access to services not provided in the past. This agreement documents and ensures consistent in-kind support from the State of Nebraska.

RECEIVED STATE GENERAL FUNDS. For the first time in the history of the Commission, the State Legislature provided financial support. The Commissioners worked very hard with the Legislature and were successful at securing a \$30,000 appropriation of State General funds. Beginning with the new state fiscal year (July 1, 2006) the funds were made available to the Commission with \$10,000 of the total being used to buy into the state's cost allocation plan.

ANNUAL BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT. An examination and identification of Commissioner skills, interests and assets through efforts led by the Commission's Organizational Development Committee. In addition, a thorough assessment of the Board's work was surveyed. The Commission will further look at ways to improve to maximize their effectiveness, advocacy, awareness and leadership.

RELATIONSHIP AND CONSULTATION WITH GOVERNOR. Annual Executive Committee meeting and periodic consultation with Governor Heineman and representatives in his office to keep him informed of our efforts and to align with his priorities for Nebraska of education, economic vitality, efficiency in government, and protecting families. We continue to have frequent contact with the Governor's office, state senators, and our national congressional delegation. A strong partnership has been forged with Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy through his role as Nebraska's Director of Homeland Security and our efforts with Citizen Corps. He has had a very active role in promotion of our Citizen Corps Program and in promoting preparedness through media interviews. We are very fortunate that our Nebraska First Lady Sally Ganem takes a very active – and increasing – role in Commission work in her role as Honorary Chair.

DIVERSITY IS A HALLMARK OF SERVENEBRASKA. ServeNebraska is taking the lead in including and addressing the needs those with disabilities. In October 2006 the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) named our organization as the lead agency for assuring and coordinating disability preparedness in Nebraska. In November 2007 we conducted an innovative Disability Preparedness Summit - uniting two of our programs (Disability and Citizen Corps) in a collaborative initiative, providing opportunity for local program representatives and persons with disability to increase their disability preparedness planning and inclusion knowledge and skills. In addition, many Nebraska disability advocacy organizations participated with volunteer-based disaster preparedness experts to learn how to improve disability preparedness community organizing and use the planning toolkits to jumpstart local efforts. Nebraska AmeriCorps members represented their programs and constituencies featuring a wide cross-section of ethnicities, ages, and abilities/disabilities. The Commission's Disability Advisory Team refocused their efforts toward building a disability preparedness program.

NEBRASKA AMERICORPS PROGRAMS ADDRESS PRESSING LOCAL NEEDS. While providing general programmatic priority areas, grant applicants are encouraged to define and build programs that focus on local needs within the general priorities. Recognizing that our portfolio of programming has been historically skewed heavily towards Lincoln and Omaha, we have worked aggressively with current and potential programs to increase national service opportunities in rural areas. This has been accomplished through developing a new program and encouraging expansion of satellite programs – particularly in the vast western portion of our state. We are very excited that the State Probation Administration developed a new program to serve eight of their very rural and under-served districts. In 2007-2008, the RISE AmeriCorps Program began operations, providing service to enhance the education and employment prospects for those on probation in rural and frontier Nebraska. Additionally, we are pleased that two programs – MMI AmeriCorps and LFS AmeriCorps, both with home agencies in Omaha – have expanded satellite operations to central and western Nebraska. LFS AmeriCorps is sponsored by Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, a faith-based organization and MMI AmeriCorps is a national leader in extending service opportunities to those with developmental disability creatively expanding ways to involve persons with disability in their home communities. All of the Nebraska AmeriCorps grantees are multi-site programs that have forged partnerships with small diverse community-based entities serving as host sites.

EXPANDING AND BUILDING NEBRASKA CITIZEN CORPS. An agreement with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in fall 2006 expanded the Commission's role to include state coordination and administration as well as managing the subgranting process to increase the impact of community preparedness at the local level. The Commission administers funds and provides technical assistance to increase local Citizen Corps Council development in Nebraska counties. The Nebraska Citizen Corps Program implemented a uniform approach to local community Council development through a Community Preparedness Campaign. Each Citizen Corps Council will develop a local Community Preparedness Campaign that includes having a plan for spontaneous volunteers, a plan to include and prepare persons with disabilities and other special populations, a plan to partner with faith organizations and a plan for pets and animals. Through these local efforts, people's abilities to help their neighbors through volunteer-

based disaster preparedness activities will continue to increase. Since disasters often require responses that exceed the capacity of one county, we have implemented a Regional Citizen Corps structure that includes eight multi-county regions throughout Nebraska who coordinate programming and planned response with each other to lessen the burden on any one county. Two key initiatives are being developed - rural communication systems for persons living on farms and ranches and disability preparedness community assessment, planning and implementation.

TRAINING HAS BROADENED IN SCOPE AND CONSTITUENCIES. Both the 2007 and 2008 Governor's Conferences on Community Service involved new audiences and featured a much broader range of topic offerings by more regional and national experts than prior years. A new method of electronic surveying has widened our input from key audiences in developing professional development opportunities. A year-long calendar has been created and is featured on our new website. Training opportunities continue to be offered to all programs in our portfolio including national directs. We have partnered with the State Office of the Corporation to provide training for AmeriCorps*VISTA members in our state.

NEBRASKA HAS SECOND (STATE) AND OMAHA HAS THE FOURTH (CITY) HIGHEST RATES OF VOLUNTEERISM IN 2007. Nebraska was again recognized in a 2007 comprehensive Corporation for National & Community Service study as the state with the second highest rate of volunteerism while Nebraska's largest city, Omaha, had the fourth highest rate of volunteerism. Our redesigned website provides new links to resources and volunteer clearinghouses. To recognize volunteer accomplishments we continue to administer the quarterly Points of Light Awards presented by the Governor, the First Lady's Community Service Awards to reflect the current 1st Lady's passion for education, and implemented the new Impact Awards to celebrate achievement in community and national service. Efforts are underway in partnership with the Lt. Governor to develop a new awards program to recognize persons in the disaster and emergency preparedness and response fields.

SERVE AS A LEAD AGENCY FOR GLOBAL YOUTH SERVICE DAY. To further engage and celebrate youth for the 2nd successive year in 2008 we are serving as a Lead Agency for Global Youth Service Day. For 2007-2008, the Nebraska InterCorps Council – composed of representatives from Nebraska's AmeriCorps and VISTA programs – is developing statewide themes and sparking their implementation for each national day of service. Through InterCorps Council efforts coordinated by our office, successful initiatives have occurred for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Read for America Day, and 13 organizations will implement projects involving more than 1,300 youth for Global Youth Service Day. We have also appointed the Executive Director of the Midwest Consortium on Service Learning in Higher Education as an ex officio member of the Commission. The Midwest Consortium includes more than 22 colleges and universities from three contiguous states and is a strong partner in furthering the civic engagement of young adults.

NEW INITIATIVE TO START A STATE BUSINESS VOLUNTEER COUNCIL. During the fall 2007 Commission Planning Retreat, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to develop a State Business Volunteer Council to expand volunteering in Nebraska through employee and workplace programs. To further build corporate involvement in volunteering and community service, ServeNebraska will soon launch a Statewide Business Volunteer Council to engaging public and private leaders. The Nebraska BVC will be based on a model similar to the one developed by the West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service. An ad hoc Commission committee has been meeting to develop the plan and structure that we will use to recruit business representatives to serve on a BVC Steering Committee. Recruiting one or two champions to lead this initiative is the focus of our current work.

SERVE NEBRASKA IS THE LEADER IN NEBRASKA IN NURTURING CROSS-STREAM UNDERSTANDING AND COLLABORATION. Directors of the State Office of the Corporation for National & Community Service-CNCS (the Nebraska administrator of VISTA and Senior Corps) and the Midwest Consortium for Service Learning in Higher Education (the Nebraska Higher Education Learn & Serve competitive grant program) serve as active ex-officio members of the Commission. The Director of the K-12 & Higher Education Learn & Serve formula grant program with the Nebraska Department of Education is a full voting member of the Commission. Each of these individuals is actively engaged in the work of the Commission and meets regularly with the Commission Executive Director and staff to enhance collaboration and expand partnership opportunities.

Partnerships

We collaborate actively on promotion and joint recruitment of national and community service participants.

Through our strong partnership with the Nebraska State CNCS Office, we have expanded our Nebraska Thrives AmeriCorps*VISTA grant project in 2007-2008. Our project has grown from a single position to three members, with additional slots possible in the future. In 2007-2008 we featured positions targeting Organizational Excellence & Sustainability, Disaster Preparedness, and Disability Outreach. [Due to recruiting challenges and staffing transition, the Disaster Preparedness and Disability Outreach positions are unfilled.] We have assumed managerial responsibility for a Graffiti Abatement VISTA member in service with the City of Lincoln at the request of the Nebraska State CNCS Office. We have also assumed responsibility for providing training for VISTA members in Nebraska at the CNCS State Office's request.

A new initiative is underway to collaborate and partner with the Midwest Consortium on a new CNCS Social Media grant. Through a collaborative agreement with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), we administer and coordinate the Citizen Corps Program in our state. Additionally, we are collaborating with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health/Emergency Response on a special populations disaster preparedness initiative that unites our Citizen Corps and Disability Preparedness Programs with local Health Departments in our state.

The Commission partners actively with the two Points of Lights Volunteer Centers in our state and is seeking linkages with small rural community versions of volunteer centers that are currently organized, many through local Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COADs), and others that will become available in times of emergencies and disasters in many Nebraska communities. The Director of the Omaha Points of Light Volunteer Center is a full voting Commissioner and former Commission chair.

We also embrace National Direct and Indian Tribe AmeriCorps programming in our efforts. Representatives of these programs participated in our 2007-2008 Program Staff Orientation, the 2007-2008 AmeriCorps Member Kick-off/Swearing-In Ceremony featuring Governor Dave Heineman, and the Nebraska InterCorps Council.

Corporation Assistance

We are appreciative of the open communication and consistent strong support of Corporation leadership and staff with whom we work. The following steps from the Corporation could strengthen our efforts:

- Support a change in the administration grant match requirement for small states that implements one of the following two methods: (1) ensure only the first \$100,000 of federal funds allocated require match, or (2) approve a waiver for the administration grant match for small states that have extreme difficulty in securing sufficient nonfederal match;
- Support and work to implement a change in the minimum administration grant funding allocation to small states at \$200,000;
- Investigate creative approaches to increasing supplemental revenues for "small states", particularly as the Corporation gets more proficient at identifying and reallocating de-obligated funds; one possible approach could actively involve "small state" representatives in exploring creative methods to more equitably allocate resources;
- Re-organize the Corporation website to make information easier to find. The site contains a wealth of valuable information and tools but locating it can be an overwhelming challenge. The same challenge exists in attempts to use the search function for The Resource Center;
- Continue the practice of prompt, open, honest communication;
- Similarly, creating a single web resource page for universal AmeriCorps-related downloadable forms, such as enrollment forms and waivers.

Four additional items that would be very beneficial are:

- Formulate and disseminate best practices for reporting in a post-WBRS environment;

- Provide a session at the Executive Director meetings to have 2-3 selected states present on emerging programs and ideas in their states (different state present at each ED meeting);
- Facilitate the planning and implementation of regional cluster in-person workshops to include substantive networking and sharing of program as well as best practices by the states; and
- Facilitate national forums and ongoing communication for Program Officers, for PDAT Officers, and for Fiscal Officers to address and discuss common concerns and share exemplary and advanced approaches.