

2.6 THE CORPORATION – COMMISSION PARTNERSHIP

Corporation for National Service Responsibilities

- Establish national priorities and quality selection criteria for programs.
- Make grants to commissions for granting to AmeriCorps*State Community-based programs.
- Administer the National Service Trust Fund and distribute education awards to AmeriCorps members.
- Provide training and technical assistance to commissions and make grants to commissions and other organizations for the same purpose.
- Provide substantial support for the AmeriCorps member's living allowance, health care insurance, and child care costs.
- Report to Congress on the status of programs and the National Service Trust Fund.
- Coordinate presidential events, public service announcements, and public awareness strategies.
- Implement a strategy to create a national identity for AmeriCorps, including promotion of AmeriCorps to potential recruits, sponsorship of common activities for AmeriCorps members, and a common logo.

Commission Responsibilities

- Provide leadership in developing State Service Plans as the framework for receiving applications for funding.
- Issue applications and provide application assistance to potential AmeriCorps*State programs applying through the state.
- Select AmeriCorps*State programs to be funded through the Formula allotment, pre-select programs for Competition, and submit the State Application to the Corporation.

- Administer their AmeriCorps*State programs and facilitate collaboration and partnerships with National Directs in the state.
- Provide training and technical assistance to AmeriCorps programs, both those funded through the commission, as well as National Directs, and to the broader network of service programs in the state.
- Monitor programs and report to the Corporation on their progress and accomplishments.

Commission Strategies

The Big Picture Vision of National Service: Developing a State Plan

Beginning in 1997, the requirement to develop a State Service Plan presented an opportunity for the commission to exercise inclusive leadership. It required the Commission to facilitate collaboration between the principal service actors in the state to collaborate in a more formal and structured way. Narrowly viewed, the State Plan requires the commission, the Corporation State Office, and the State Department of Education to come together to develop a single plan. The plan serves as the framework for the grant making and deployment of service resources by the three parties. The three parties assume greater responsibility to coordinate program activities and build support for community service.

The State Plan served as a vehicle for creating a broad vision for promoting national service and volunteering and for building a solid infrastructure of high quality service programs and support services. The plan is a blueprint for identifying state priorities, themes, and areas of emphasis among all the streams of service: Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps, and the National Senior Corps.

Program Application Process

Just as the process for developing a State Plan was open and accessible to all interested parties, so too must the process by which the commission solicits funding applications. The commission is expected to widely publicize the availability of funds, distribute a clear and easily understood application packet, and offer technical assistance to potential applicants.

The application instructions should reflect the themes and priorities of the state and those established by the Corporation. The following lists the programs and which priorities (state or national) apply:

- State priorities for AmeriCorps*State Formula funds.
- National priorities for AmeriCorps*State Competitive funds.
- State and national priorities for Learn and Serve America as determined annually by the Corporation and the state.

Program Selection Process

Commissions are expected to develop a fair and impartial process for reviewing and selecting applicants for potential funding. How involved commission members will be in the review process will vary from state to state. Where commission members are actively involved in reviewing program applications and potential service providers, their expertise and awareness of community needs in the state can make a valuable contribution to the process. However, there may be some situations where the administrative procedures of the state provide clear restrictions on the participation of commission members in the review process.

Commission members have a critical decision making role in the selection of AmeriCorps formula funded programs. They play an equally critical role in the selection of programs to be recommended to the Corporation for AmeriCorps for competitive funding. Their involvement, however, must not involve any actual or apparent conflict of interest.

Commissions have the option of applying for Community-based Learn and Serve America funding. If successful, a process of recruiting and selecting potential subgrantees needs to be designed and implemented. It should reflect the same degree of care, scrutiny, and impartiality as the AmeriCorps process. [NOTE: In April 2011, Congress eliminated funding for all Learn and Serve programs.]

Program Administration

Commissions need to have a well-functioning board of appointees. Through a close relationship with the Governor's office, commissions need to assure their own continuity and stability with the appointment of a diverse group of committed individuals who can enable the group to function effectively and to carry out its varied responsibilities. In addition to filling the slots that are mandated by law, commissions have included representatives from foundations, corporations and legislative bodies.

It is critical that commissions have staff with the appropriate skills and experience to administer an organization and manage its programs. Commissions need to make sure that policies and systems are in place that ensures accountability and continuous improvement. They are fiscally responsible for the grant funds they receive, both for their own administrative functioning and for the programs they fund. It is imperative that the commissions maintain appropriate financial management systems to disburse funds and track expenses. It is also important that commissions take seriously their responsibility for their own sustainability, as well as assisting their programs in meeting their match requirements.

Program Support

Commissions have the responsibility to support programs and to work with them to ensure that they are of high quality. Commissions need to focus on continuous improvement, making sure that the necessary monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to assess progress and to provide appropriate feedback to programs.

Commissions have available to them an annual allotment of Program Development Assistance and Training (PDAT) funds. It is the commission's responsibility to determine the needs to be addressed and

to develop the training and technical assistance strategies that move the state towards its vision of national and community service.

Corporation and Commission Shared Responsibilities and Complementary Strategies

The Corporation and commission share basic responsibilities and have developed the following complementary strategies to meet those responsibilities:

- Implement a training and technical assistance strategy that provides the necessary support to assure that the programs are of the highest quality.
- Implement the Corporation's national evaluation strategy with continued program assessment and reporting by commissions.
- Implement a national and state sustainability strategy designed to leverage additional federal, state, and private sector funds and encourage support for local programs.
- Implement a national recruitment/referral and placement system in coordination with state recruitment efforts.

Training and Technical Assistance

Regular assessment of training and technical assistance (T/TA) needs is an essential part of operating continuously-improving, effective programs. Accordingly, T/TA is available at three different levels:

1. At the national level through a cadre of national T/TA provider agencies.
2. At the state level through the commission and directly to the Tribes. The Corporation awards each commission and each Tribe program development and training (PDAT) funds specifically to facilitate statewide commission-sponsored activities, and AmeriCorps program attendance at national provider workshops.
3. At the local or individual program level. AmeriCorps programs, including national direct organizations and their sites, are encouraged to budget funds for local training and technical assistance.

Commission

Many AmeriCorps programs have training and technical assistance needs specific to the type and focus of the program and the strategy of the state. Commissions are often in the best position to identify needs and provide technical assistance to programs. It is the Corporation's intent to support these efforts by providing funding for them. Proposals for funding PDAT activity, including a plan of action, are developed and submitted by commissions as part of their application for administrative funding.

Information on the level of available funding and the types of T/TA the Corporation suggests are contained in the Commission Application Guidelines.

Corporation

The Corporation has arranged for the services of national organizations that provide training and technical assistance to programs as well as to state commissions. The national T/TA providers are experienced, well-established organizations selected by the Corporation after a rigorous competitive process. All bring strong track records of working with non-profits and volunteers or community service agencies. T/TA offered through the national providers includes support in organizational development, fiscal management, program management, evaluation, fund raising, conflict resolution, pre-service training and supervision. Assistance is also available to programs in organizational and managerial issues and for skills training in education, preventive health care, the environment, public safety, independent living, homeland security, and the full inclusion of people with disabilities. The services offered include:

- On-site consultations;
- Training workshops;
- Relevant informational materials, drawing on the best from the field
 - Sample forms
 - Guidelines and checklists
 - Easy to use training curricula
 - Bibliographies of best practices;
- Phone consultation;
- On-line consultation and materials; and
- Peer exchange opportunities-in person, on the phone, or on-line.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation

Performance measurement and evaluation strategies are implemented on two fronts. The commissions use program monitoring and program performance measurement as a management tool, while national level evaluation research—along with data provided by the commissions to the Corporation—are incorporated into a macro view of programs which focuses on community and participant impacts and effective practices.

Commission

Program monitoring and performance measurement should be used by commissions primarily as management tools that help programs to improve. Commissions can ensure program improvement by requiring programs to have strong mission statements and clear and demonstrable performance measures. By monitoring progress toward these objectives, commissions may continuously assess the management effectiveness of programs, the quality of services provided, and the satisfaction of both participants and service recipients. Commissions will be required to collect basic descriptive data on programs and participants and report progress annually to the Corporation.

Corporation

At the national level the Corporation will perform extensive evaluations to assess the overall impacts of national service on citizens, communities and members; to identify effective program practices; and to provide data for decision-makers. Programs will also be required to provide an annual summary of their service accomplishments. The Corporation's studies will build on individual program and state data, and will draw conclusions that are possible only from a larger sampling and larger perspective. The results will be available to local programs and the commissions to support their work and inform their future planning.

Sustainability

National and commission sustainability strategies will be designed to leverage additional federal, state, and private sector funds, and encourage support for local programs.

Commission

Commissions must assure that their own administrative match is met. They need to assess periodically their capacity to address the broad challenges and responsibilities they have, and explore public and private support to enhance their capability. In addition, through the development of partnerships with foundations and local businesses, commissions can serve as catalysts in assisting local programs to expand their funding base. Commissions can help forge relationships between the private sector and Corporation funded programs and encourage businesses, foundations, and other public and private funders to help programs meet their match requirements, obtain management assistance, reach out to the community, or find uniforms, equipment or project-related materials for their participants.

Corporation

The primary sustainability objectives of the Corporation are: first, to support the capacity of local programs to form partnerships and raise funds; second, to educate the private and philanthropic sectors about the benefits of supporting national service programs; third, to improve the quality and innovation of service programs; fourth, to build a national infrastructure that supports all service programs and fosters new forms of communication, and; finally, to create a strong national identity for AmeriCorps and other Corporation funded programs, that enhances their recognition in each community. The Corporation will keep commissions informed of any private sector assistance given to local programs in their state and may request similar information from Commissions.

Recruitment

With the coordination of local recruitment efforts, a national recruitment/referral and placement system will be implemented.

Commission

Because local programs have primary responsibility for recruiting and selecting participants, commissions' role in assisting programs will vary widely. Commissions that assist local programs with recruitment of AmeriCorps participants may want to shape a strategy around the requirement that programs be diverse, in rural and urban settings, and in "areas of need." Statewide recruitment efforts might include a statewide toll-free number, public service announcements, and targeted outreach to diverse communities.

Corporation

To assist local programs in their own recruitment and to inform potential participants about AmeriCorps, the Corporation has instituted a national toll-free number, 1-800-942-2677 and an online application process found at www.americorps.org. The names and basic demographic information on interested applicants will be entered into a national database. Information on local AmeriCorps programs will be sent to callers as soon as it is available. Commissions, and local programs, may request sorted lists (by zip code, program interest/skill, education level, and age) of callers from the database. In addition to the information and referral system, the Corporation will conduct outreach mailings and develop media strategies to ensure widespread recognition of and diverse participation in AmeriCorps.