

1. OVERVIEW OF CORPORATION REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

A. WHAT IS PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY?

Program Sustainability is the ability of an AmeriCorps program to continue engaging a community's citizens to meet the needs of the community, through potentially changing circumstances and sources of support. The Corporation for National and Community Service views its grants as investments, expected to yield results significantly beyond those attributable to the specific Federal funds provided. The 2004 AmeriCorps Guidelines include a variety of suggestions for achieving program sustainability, including the diversification of revenue sources, partnerships and collaborative strategies, organizational and community capacity building, and the strategic use of AmeriCorps members and community volunteers. Because your AmeriCorps program is designed to address critical local needs, you need to begin developing strategies early for how services will build on the specific activities supported by your grant.

B. WHAT IS CAPACITY BUILDING?

Capacity Building is a process that helps a program or organization enhance its mission, strategy, skills, systems, infrastructure, and human resources to better serve community needs. Experience has shown that to foster and *sustain* effective programs, organizations must be both viable and well-managed. Regardless of how imaginative a program's design may be, its effectiveness will be largely dependent on a variety of other factors, including the skill of the organization in implementing the program, its financial viability, its capacity to establish effective quality controls, its ability to measure program performance, its skill in creating partnerships and mobilizing volunteers and resources for its activities, and its ability to provide various forms of administrative support.

Therefore, capacity building is essential to the sustainability of programs and sponsoring organizations so they can continue to meet community needs efficiently and effectively. The next section of the Toolkit provides some specific examples of how AmeriCorps programs have successfully used capacity building to enhance their prospects for sustainability.

C. WHAT ARE CNCS REQUIREMENTS?

CNCS envisions a key role for AmeriCorps members in building program capacity and developing local volunteers.

"AmeriCorps strengthens communities by involving citizens directly in serving

community needs. AmeriCorps members help bring individuals and groups from different backgrounds together to cooperate in achieving constructive change and to solve critical community problems....”

*“...A fundamental purpose of AmeriCorps is to help recruit, support, and manage the vast networks of volunteers that meet community needs. By creating volunteer opportunities and helping organizations to effectively engage volunteers, AmeriCorps programs multiply their impact, build organizational capacity, and support the development of sustainable programs ... Accordingly, successful applicants will be those that address how their AmeriCorps program will effectively engage and support volunteers in meeting community needs.”
(2004 AmeriCorps Guidelines, p. 13)*

Likewise, CNCS recognizes the crucial importance of sustainability principles:

The Corporation sees sustainability as vital to meeting the needs of communities across the country. In order to ensure that Corporation programs are sustainable, applications should include specific information that demonstrates how an organization intends to improve capacity and move towards sustainability, ensuring that its national and community service program can continue in the absence of Corporation funding. We will use plans and progress towards achieving sustainability as a criterion in making new and continuation grant awards. (2004 AmeriCorps Guidelines, p. 18)

With regard to AmeriCorps members, the *Guidelines* further notes that the role members may play in the building of capacity has changed:

*“Previously the Corporation had advised that only AmeriCorps*VISTA members may conduct certain capacity-building activities. We now encourage AmeriCorps members to engage in certain capacity building activities as well. For example, AmeriCorps members may recruit and manage other volunteers...write training materials...assist in raising funds and securing resources to support service activities...conduct outreach to expand the number of individuals served...develop community partnerships that are intended to strengthen communities...” (2004 AmeriCorps Guidelines, p. 18-19)*

This toolkit will help you consider strategies for incorporating the Corporation for National and Community Service’s new requirements into your program.

D. EXPECTATIONS AND BENEFITS

CNCS expects your program to demonstrate how AmeriCorps members can reinforce and build relationships with partners such as community leaders, foundations, residents,

organizations, and businesses. CNCS encourages programs to address issues such as the following in the program planning process:

- The extent of your organization's tools and infrastructure to support AmeriCorps members in their volunteer recruitment and management work.
- How local relationships cultivated and forged by AmeriCorps members will be consistently linked to organizational leadership.
- How the program will be continued, in dollars and time, after AmeriCorps resources (including members) end.

There are corresponding benefits for sponsors of AmeriCorps programs who use this approach. AmeriCorps members will be available for many program capacity building efforts as well as for recruiting, organizing, and coordinating volunteer activities. These activities can help your program to:

- Identify and respond to changing community needs.
- Build community support for effective and needed services.
- Design and implement community outreach strategies.
- Cultivate partnerships and generate funds and in-kind resources

E. WHAT THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE WILL LOOK FOR IN PROGRAMS AND APPLICATIONS

In assessing program performance and evaluating future applications, CNCS will consider how programs deal with a range of activities related to capacity building and assuring program sustainability. Evaluators will be looking to see if programs:

- Show diversity of partners, financiers, resources, and/or plans to achieve such diversity.
- Show plans/strategies for what will happen after AmeriCorps grant ends.
- Identify all present stakeholders and partners; include them in program planning activities and collect input from them on program objectives, activities, etc.
- Make and implement plans/strategies for researching and contacting potential stakeholders and partners.
- Construct and use communication networks in the community and among all stakeholders and partners (present and future) and keep the community and stakeholders informed.
- Develop and implement an outreach plan to further the program and increase its visibility; prepare a case for program support.
- Develop and implement a plan to make regular visits and presentations on community activities, accomplishments, involvement, and needs.
- Approach and work with the media, hold events, prepare materials, interviews, fact sheets, press releases, etc.

- Orient and train staff, members, and volunteers in the skills and techniques of marketing and program promotion.
- Research potential grant-making groups (foundations, agencies, and corporations) and other donor or contributory groups.
- Write and submit grant proposals to diverse sources to fund the program.
- Prepare and implement a resource development strategy that includes a variety of approaches (mailings, events, one-on-one appeals, fee for service activities, etc.).

CNCS has a particular interest in volunteer recruitment and management, and will want to know if programs:

- Assess program needs and match them with appropriate volunteer roles and skills.
- Research likely sources of potential volunteers.
- Prepare and utilize a “volunteer marketing strategy or plan.”
- Prepare program materials, make presentations, and inform the community about the program.
- Recruit volunteers to play active roles in the program (and not just supply administrative support).
- Prepare and use volunteer interview and screening plans and develop hiring and selection tools and procedures.
- Develop a complete volunteer strategy that includes volunteer position descriptions, policies, and procedures.
- Design and implement a strategy to direct volunteer efforts and energy into needed community services.
- Develop and carry out a plan for volunteer orientation and training.
- Monitor, coordinate, and assess volunteer performance.
- Provide feedback and skill development opportunities to volunteers, and ways to recognize volunteer contributions.
- Include opportunities for volunteers to increase their responsibilities and skills.
- Provide structure and opportunities for coaching volunteers.
- Transfer responsibilities from AmeriCorps members to volunteers, as members finish their service and/or the grant ends.