

Office of  
Leadership,  
Development  
and Training

# Building a High Quality AmeriCorps Program

*From Blueprint to Implementation:*  
**New Program Start-up Guide**

Corporation for  
NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE 

CHP International developed “**Building a High Quality AmeriCorps Program**” for the Corporation for National and Community Service, 1201 New York Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20525

### **About the Corporation**

For more than a decade, the Corporation for National and Community Service—through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs—has mobilized a new generation of engaged citizens. This year, more than 1.6 million individuals of all ages and backgrounds will serve through those programs to help thousands of national and community nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and local agencies meet local needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other critical areas. National and community service programs work closely with traditional volunteer organizations to broaden, deepen, and strengthen the ability of America's volunteers to contribute not only to their communities, but also to our nation.

### **SENIOR CORPS**

Each year Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of more than 500,000 Americans age 55 and older to meet a wide range of community challenges through three main programs: RSVP, the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program.

### **AMERICORPS**

AmeriCorps provides opportunities for more than 70,000 Americans each year to give intensive service to their communities and country through three programs: AmeriCorps\*State and National, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, and AmeriCorps\*NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps).

### **LEARN AND SERVE AMERICA**

Learn and Serve America provides an "on-ramp" to a lifetime of civic engagement for more than a million students each year. The program awards grants to state education agencies, schools, nonprofit groups, and institutions of higher education to engage students in service activities linked to academic achievement.

CHP International, Inc. (CHP), Oak Park IL, provides management, training and consulting expertise to projects in the United States and around the world. CHP collaborates closely with government, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and training providers to assist in developing techniques, skills, knowledge and attitudes required to foster individual, organization and community development.

Upon request, this material will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities.

## *Acknowledgments*

The development of this document “Building a High Quality AmeriCorps Program” was based on effective practices created and implemented by staff of AmeriCorps programs as they worked to plan, implement, and sustain their programs. A Steering Committee of managers of AmeriCorps programs, most of whom are field-based, also provided input on the content and structure of this guide. Community laypersons, national service experts, and program directors contributed expertise and knowledge of programmatic needs in rural, suburban, and urban program environments. Countless other people participated in many ways such as contributing practical, ready-to-use documents, forms, and tools, and providing informal feedback on the structure and content of the Guide.

We held focus groups with program staff, during various conferences, to identify critical sections, tools, practices, and documents that field based practitioners would need to develop strong AmeriCorps programs. The input from these groups is reflected in the Guide.

AmeriCorps Program Officers from the Corporation for National and Community Service contributed their knowledge of programmatic needs and challenges to this process. Program Officers were instrumental in identifying common challenges faced by new and existing programs. These observations and recommendations were incorporated into the Guide.

In its many draft forms, we asked community members who are not grantees of the Corporation to read and comment on the document’s ease of use and readability. Their thoughtful feedback was incorporated in our attempt to ensure that the Guide was practical and accessible to all users.

Representatives of many offices at the Corporation reviewed and edited the document for accuracy of the information provided. We want to especially acknowledge AmeriCorps Program Officers, Lois Nembhard and Paula Fisher, along with the Office of Grants Management Director, Peg Rosenberry and Grants Officer, Stacy Bishop, for their contribution to the writing of this guide.

The guide was written, edited, and prepared through CHP International and the Corporation for National and Community Service by Jenny DuFresne, lead writer, and Janet Peters Mauceri. This process was guided and organized by consultants Jenny DuFresne and Janet Peters Mauceri working with Gina Fulbright-Powell, Sr. Training Officer in the Corporation’s Office of Leadership Development and Training.

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## ***CORPORATION WELCOME***

The Corporation for National and Community Service is pleased to provide you with this Guide to starting and maintaining a high-quality AmeriCorps program.

For over a decade, the Corporation – through AmeriCorps and two other national service programs, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America – has forged thousands of partnerships with individuals such as you, and with organizations such as yours, to “get things done” for America. Since 1993, more than 300,000 AmeriCorps members have provided substantial service to communities and community groups across the country, helping to meet critical needs in education, the environment, public safety, and many other areas. We thank you for your interest in joining their ranks, and congratulate you for wanting to create the most effective program that you can.

There are many components to the design and operation of a successful AmeriCorps program. This publication will help you understand those components and take you through the steps needed to initiate, organize, and maintain a well-managed, high-quality AmeriCorps program. Indeed, all the information and suggestions you need to successfully navigate up through the first year of an AmeriCorps program – including dozens of “sample documents” – are contained in this Guide.

The Guide also serves as an introduction to the network of resources provided by the Corporation and its affiliated organizations, including your host or parent organization, your state service commission, your Corporation state office, our numerous training and technical assistance providers, our Web sites, and our many publications. We encourage you to avail yourselves of all these resources. If AmeriCorps\*State and National does not suit your needs, we encourage you to look at how our two other AmeriCorps programs—AmeriCorps\*VISTA and AmeriCorps\*NCCC—might be able to help. More information is available throughout this Guide or by visiting [www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org) or [www.americorps.org](http://www.americorps.org).

As you take the next step toward building an effective AmeriCorps program, we are confident that you will find this publication to be a useful and valuable resource. Thanks again for your interest in AmeriCorps, and for your commitment to helping your fellow citizens through service.



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David Eisner, Chief Executive Officer  
Corporation for National and Community Service



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Rosie Mauk, Director, AmeriCorps

# ***GUIDE OVERVIEW***

## ***Introduction***

The AmeriCorps Program Start-up Guide is designed to assist you in creating and developing your program so that you can join the thousands of communities across the nation that are getting things done for America through AmeriCorps. Since 1993, individuals like you and organizations such as yours have engaged in substantial service to communities through AmeriCorps.

The Program Start-up Guide was conceived and developed with input from a field-based team. The team consisted of representatives from AmeriCorps State Commissions and their subgrantees/programs, National Direct Parent Organizations, education award programs, and tribal programs, including small community and faith-based organizations. These practitioners represented programs from rural, urban, and suburban locales. Team members represented programs across the Corporation's main issue areas: education, environment, public safety, health/human needs, and digital divide. Corporation staff and national training and technical assistance providers rounded out the team. The team used its collective knowledge of high quality programs and effective practices necessary for the first 12 months of program development to set the structure and content of the Guide.

Although every effort was made to ensure that the content of the Guide is the most current, from time to time updates or changes to policy, practices, and regulations are made. To ensure you have the most up-to-date information, be sure to periodically check the website [www.nationalservice.org/resources](http://www.nationalservice.org/resources) website for updates and additional resources.

At the publication of this document, the Corporation is in the process of upgrading and integrating its technological capabilities. In particular, the Corporation has begun to incorporate the capability of its Web-Based Reporting System (WBRS) – the system that tracks information associated with an enrolled AmeriCorps member—into eGrants, the system through which organizations apply for grants and submit compliance reports. These improvements will allow the Corporation to get a much better snapshot of member enrollments at any given time. As you read and use this Guide, be aware that WBRS and eGrants information is presented separately and does not reflect the integration of the two systems. Therefore, there may be some differences between the information presented here and the use of the integrated system.

There are many facets to conducting a successful AmeriCorps program. From recruiting staff and AmeriCorps members, to establishing community partnerships, to evaluating the impact of your members and their service, the Guide contains information to lead you through the first year of a high quality AmeriCorps program.

## ***Audience***

The Guide is designed with four audiences in mind. First, prospective AmeriCorps program applicants can assess their organization's capacity to start an AmeriCorps program. Second, start-up programs with no previous AmeriCorps experience are led through the step-by-step process of program design and implementation. Third, existing AmeriCorps programs can use the Guide to

review, refine, and strengthen their systems and operations. Finally, the Guide is a resource for new staff coming into an AmeriCorps program.

### *AmeriCorps' Required Documents*

There are a number of documents you must understand and follow as you consider applying for the AmeriCorps grant and moving into the program design phase. Below is a list of documents you need to consult to ensure you have the latest information regarding the regulations, provisions, and requirements of becoming an AmeriCorps program.

- Application Guidelines (available on-line)
- Corporation for National and Community Service regulations (available on-line)
- National and Community Service Act of 1990 (available on-line)
- Office of Management and Budget Circulars (available on-line)

Once your organization receives funding your guiding documents will also include:

- AmeriCorps Program Proposal (application) and any modifications (this is your proposal to the Corporation)
- Your AmeriCorps grant, issued by your state commission, your national parent organization, or the Corporation for National and Community Service, which includes all the special conditions applicable to operating your program.
- The budget for your program, which contains the maximum amount of funds the Corporation has provided for your program as well as your obligations to raise matching funds and in-kind contributions.

### *Design*

The experiences of other AmeriCorps programs teach us that the program design phases through the first six months of operations are the most critical phases. To ensure your success, we paid close attention to the tasks relevant to the program design through the first six months of program implementation and operations. However, you will also find program information for months seven through twelve. Frequently there are repeated processes during this time period, so less information is included.

We organized all tasks according to these important time phases.

- Preparing the Ground
- Laying the Foundation
- Framing the Program - Program Design
- Building the Program - 0-3 months
- Sustaining the Program - 4-6 months
- Maintaining the Program - 7-12 months

In each time phase, four major program components are explained.

- Program Development and Management
- Community and Site Partnerships
- Member Development and Support
- Financial and Grants Management

The chart below illustrates the structure and scope of the Guide.

| <b>Program Time Phases</b>                       |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Preparing the Ground</i>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational assessment.</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Laying the Foundation</i>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Development &amp; Management</li> <li>• Community &amp; Site Partnerships</li> <li>• Member Development &amp; Support</li> <li>• Financial &amp; Grants Management</li> </ul> |
| <i>Framing the Program<br/>Program Design</i>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing the program.</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Building the Program<br/>0 – 3 Months</i>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Development &amp; Management</li> <li>• Community &amp; Site Partnerships</li> <li>• Member Development &amp; Support</li> <li>• Financial &amp; Grants Management</li> </ul> |
| <i>Sustaining the Program<br/>4 – 6 months</i>   |  |
| <i>Maintaining the Program<br/>7 – 12 months</i> |  |

### *Organizing Features*

The information in the Guide is organized using a question and answer format.

- **What do you need to know?**
- **Why do you need to know it?**
- **How do you do it?**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**
- **Resources:** Includes reference materials, websites, and contact information.
- **Tools for Success:** A section at the end of each chapter with tools, checklists, and forms.

At the end of the Guide, you will find a brief history of national and community service, an explanation of the Corporation’s national and community service programs, and specific information on the agency. Collectively, this information will broaden your understanding of the national service network.

### *Using the Guide*

To ensure the highest degree of relevancy, we have gathered information and resources from conversations, focus groups, and from persons who have successfully managed programs from start-up to sustained growth. We are hopeful that the Guide can help you minimize frustrating mistakes or delays by providing clear, useful information.

There are several ways to use the information in the Guide. We recommend that initially you focus on the time phases to ensure that you complete all necessary tasks.

1. You can read the Guide cover-to-cover.
2. You can scan the Table of Contents and choose the topics that can help you right away.
3. You can focus on the specific program time phase in which you are working.
4. You can use the Guide as an overall program-tracking tool.
5. You can pull the Guide up on the web and search the contents by topic at [www.nationalservice.org/resources/online\\_pubs/americorps/startupguide.php](http://www.nationalservice.org/resources/online_pubs/americorps/startupguide.php).

### ***Note about Tools, Models, and Best Practices***

This manual contains a wealth of information intended to help AmeriCorps grantees effectively manage the federal grants they receive from the Corporation for National and Community Service and establish and operate successful programs. This information comes from the Corporation, our training and technical assistance providers, other federal agencies, and grantees around the country including City Year, United Way of Minneapolis, the Catholic Network of VolunteerService, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Delta Service Corps, Missouri Community Service Commission, MANYCorps, Walker and Co., LLP, National Association of Service and Conservation Corps, and the National Readiness & Response Corps. All have graciously agreed to share their policies and what they consider to be their best practices with the entire field. Please feel free to use and modify any document or presentation found in this manual.

While Corporation staff and our outside contractors have reviewed all the documents in this manual, the sample materials in this manual are non-sanctioned policies or best practices for you to use as you deem appropriate. The contents of this manual do not constitute the Corporation for National and Community Service's official definitive interpretation of specific factual or legal questions. Please consult your grant provisions for relevant rules and grant guidance.