

2010 **Board Member Institute**

PEER SESSION NOTES

CNCS OVERVIEW

Key Points:

- The new strategic plan has 6 focus areas yet to be fully defined that will guide future AmeriCorps grants making – and will be factors in decision-making concerning competitive grants
- Opportunity to utilize new marketing and media approaches to increase exposure in our states
- National AmeriCorps programs and state commissions are valuable partners to each other – including training and member development
- State commissions understand state-specific needs and geographic areas ripe for new programming. National programs have focused, content specific services to offer to meet local needs.

Questions to Ask:

- Are we going to target some or all focus areas in our state?
- Do we continue to fund programs that fall outside focus areas?

Need from CNCS:

- Definitive answers to these 2 questions from CNCS

STEWARDSHIP

Key Points:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Humility
- Our decisions are a reflection on us
- As a funder we are purchasing services rather than providing services, we serve as a clearinghouse of ideas on what works, and provide oversight and accountability.

Questions to Ask:

- What is the most strategic way to have the greatest impact?
- Are we making good choices and making the best investments for our communities?

Needs from CNCS:

- We need more guidance and training from CNCS on their grant process.
- We need CNCS to provide more regionally focused (and appropriate) branding and publicity for state commissions (e.g., media in the South will not want to show 9-11 PSA.)

STRATEGY FOR ADAPTIVE CHANGE

Key Points:

- Identify needs and priorities in your state or area
- Relationship with legislature for funding is key – need to also work with the Governor
- State and agree on a clear mission for your commission/organization

Questions to Ask:

- What are our state needs and priorities? How do we know this?

- What are the key relationships we need to nurture?
- What is your organization's theory of change?
- What is our commission/organizational mission? Do we actively use it to guide our work? How?
- What documents do we have available that will assist with developing a strategic portfolio of programs?
- How can we better inform our Strategic Plan and other guiding documents?

COMMUNICATION/OUTREACH

Key Points:

- Assign commissioners as ambassadors to key sites/programs around the state – take ownership
- Give alumni the opportunity to help spread the message about AmeriCorps
- Get AmeriCorps Programs to do public information displays in shopping malls and other public places to spread the word
- Videos, factsheets and other materials are available free on the CNCS website (www.nationalservice.org) and at www.serve.gov)

Questions to Ask:

- How do we “invite” and “assign” commissioners to take ownership?
- How do we keep in touch with our AmeriCorps alums to make use of their skills?

LEVERAGING DATA

Key Points:

- What data is being collected? What do we need?
- Set up dashboards of summary data to help identify program problems early so they can be addressed
- Consider the audience for reports
- All data should have a narrative and vice versa
- Know what questions we are trying to answer and why

Questions to Ask:

- What story do we want to tell? To whom?
- What data do we have and where is it?
- How is our data tied to funding?
- Do we have the internal expertise in data collection and leveraging?
- What are “good” versus “bad” indicators? What do we do when we see either one?
- How do we share information about best practices and what works within our own portfolio?

Needs from CNCS:

- Procedures for industries/field to ask/use
- Share replication and best practice ideas

LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

Key Points:

- We are operating in a VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world...
- Some problems we face are not solvable – do we have the skills to flip them into opportunities for innovation and change?
- Are we clear on our organizational mission and direction yet also flexible in how we do things?
- Commissioners sign a letter of commitment
- Have an attendance policy for commissioners
- Provide commissioner training/orientation as well as ongoing training
- Regular communication between the Executive Committee and functional committees monthly
- Involvement and process of grant applications - present to full commission as a way to inform
- Inclusion of commissioners in strategic planning for next 3-5 years
- Hold meetings at program sites to educate commissioners

- Conduct an annual evaluation of commissions and staff
- Stability of commissioners at the discretion of Governors

Questions to Ask:

- How will the Serve America Act and other trends affect the future of our organization?
- How can we train our commissioners to be stronger leaders/champions of AmeriCorps and national service in their communities? What materials do they need?
- Are we being innovative in our approach or are we trying to do more using the same old models and processes?
- Which of our commissioners exhibit the 10 leadership skills for the future and how do we construct our work teams to tap people with varied skills to improve effectiveness?

CATALYTIC PHILANTHROPY

Key Points:

- Identify key problems and then prioritize
- Talk to key partners (Governor, mayors, etc.)
- Convene key thinkers/align stakeholders
- Identify potential funders and partners
- Explore how best to get a funding stream (501c3 or a community foundation?)

Questions to Ask:

- Do we want to specify our work? Just education, etc.
- Do we want to align with the Governor's priorities?
- Who are potential funders? Who is already in our network?
- Are the right people on our commission to maximize effectiveness?
- Do we want to explore a 501c3? Are we housed correctly?

Needs from CNCS:

- Be aware of our specific state needs
- Supply data from around the country
- Develop a place where we can share best practices from around the country. Tell us who is doing great things and how.
- Help us identify (national) funders in our area
- Streamline the AmeriCorps grants process
- Simplify – simplify – simplify the system