WBRS Retirement Frequently Asked Questions

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General Questions

1. Why is the Corporation retiring WBRS?

WBRS was initially created by Aguirre, Inc. as a tool for State Commissions and National parent organizations to manage their subgrantees and sites, and to provide annual financial and progress reporting to the Corporation. It eventually included electronic timesheets for individual members that programs used to demonstrate compliance with Corporation regulations including the 20% cap on training time, and the 10% cap on fundraising time.

In the last several years, the Corporation has taken the position that it is more logical to seat power and responsibility as close as possible to the communities in which we invest. As a result, we have made it a key focus to devolve certain program management responsibilities from the Corporation to the State Commissions. An example of a change the Corporation is making in this effort is to move away from keeping member timesheets in a system owned by a Corporation contractor. The most appropriate custodian of a system of record is the grantee itself.

In addition, we think that decentralizing the member timekeeping function, and de-coupling subgrantee reporting systems will result in increased organizational capacity at the state and local level. Commissions have in some cases sidestepped using state financial reporting systems due to their use of WBRS. Many universities and states have financial reporting systems that grantees could use to collect financial reporting information from subgrantees. Building a productive relationship with these entities can lead to long-term sustainability for Commissions, National grantee partners, and most importantly, for Commission programs and National subsites.

Another advantage of working with state, university, or other partners on financial reporting, progress reporting, and member management systems is that these systems are frequently capable of managing multiple federal and other kinds of grants. This is more efficient and practical than using WBRS for Corporation grants, another system for Department of Education funds, and yet another system for accounting for support from a private or community foundation. Partnerships with these institutions will lead to greater capacity to access and manage a diverse portfolio.

In addition, the current version of WBRS needs numerous updates in order to align it with policy changes made over the past few years. As the Corporation is moving toward grantees increasingly managing programs in a manner customized to their needs, it is preferable to offer a new, simpler system than to attempt to retrofit an old one that does not reflect our current policies.

Furthermore, retiring WBRS will reduce burden for some grantees. Many of our National partners have developed their own stand-alone systems for member management and reporting, and have had to double-enter all of the information recorded in their own system into WBRS.

Another trend affecting the decision to retire WBRS is an increased awareness at the Corporation that we have to stop collecting data that we do not use. For years, we leaders in the field and other stakeholders have voiced serious concerns about the amount of data collected, how it was put to use, and the burden created for grantees.

We are currently engaged in a Corporation-wide comprehensive survey of our data collection systems in order to ascertain which collections are necessary to ensure we have adequate and meaningful data with which to respond to stakeholders, assess our performance, and engage in continual improvement activities. Retiring WBRS has given us the opportunity to design a new reporting structure in which we only ask for the data we need. We encourage our State and National partners to perform a similar inventory of current data collection strategies and similarly assess which collections are truly necessary.

2. **What are some examples of how to estimate the new (Section I) demographic reporting elements in the Grantee Progress Report?**
   You will find below some examples of the types of leveraged volunteers you might count under three of the new demographic categories.

   Leveraged volunteers:
   Disadvantaged children and youth: If your volunteers are from K-12 schools, youth groups, summer camps or programs for youth, youth sports teams, or youth church groups, you can use local demographic percentages such as school lunch statistics, poverty information, or census demographics to extrapolate a percentage that are disadvantaged.
   College students: Volunteers from community or technical college, college, or university campus or campus group.
   Baby boomers: Volunteers from local civic groups such as Rotary, Kiwanis, or Chambers of Commerce; adult volunteers from local businesses, hobby clubs, or senior centers.

3. **What are some examples of how to document compliance with the 80/20 rule on training without relying on individual member timesheets?**

   The preamble to the rule states that "[t]he Corporation is establishing the base for the aggregate 20% limitation as the number of hours members agree to perform in their term of service, as reflected upon their enrollment in the National Service Trust." (http://www.americorps.gov/about/ac/americorps_rule_register.pdf) In order to document compliance with this rule, programs need to be able to show total aggregate hours spent in training not per member, but for each Commission and National partner as a whole. The My AmeriCorps portal will provide total hours enrolled for each member, but will not calculate the total aggregate number of hours spent in training as WBRS did.

Total aggregate number of hours in education and training can be documented in an annual training plan, a calendar format, a spreadsheet, or in a list of types of training and hours of training expected to be delivered. Remember that the auditors audit to your policies. As long as you have a policy that states how you are documenting compliance, and the documentation supporting your compliance with your policy, you will be considered in compliance.

4. **When will the new reporting screens be available for review?**
   We expect to have the new reporting screens available for review on October 25, 2007.

5. **What transactions will have to take place in the new portal and when?**
   Once the My AmeriCorps Portal becomes functional, you will have to perform all transactions with Trust implications in the portal. You will not have to re-enroll members that were enrolled prior to the day the portal goes live. You will have to exit all members in the portal starting on the day the portal goes live. WBRS will still be available to Commissions, National parent organizations, subgrantees, and sites at least until Release 3 of the portal.

6. **Will we be able to extract existing data from WBRS?**
   Yes. You can print out member rosters, as well as financial and progress reports just as you are able to now. You can also export member information to an Excel spreadsheet.

7. **Previously we could obtain grant ID numbers from WBRS. We need eGrants to do this since the number is needed to participate in the online recruiting system.**
   A grant ID number is associated with each grant on several screens in eGrants. From the eGrants home page, the list of awarded grants includes grant ID numbers. When you click on a grant, you will find the grant application ID under Grant Application Info, and under NOFA Information. It also appears on the Notice of Grant Award.

8. **When was the fifth strategic initiative on disaster preparedness and response added to the strategic plan?**
   The fifth initiative on disaster preparedness and response was added by the Corporation Board at their February meeting.

9. **We're a National Direct, how do we go about sharing existing systems with State grantees?**
   The Association of State Commissions would be a good vehicle for this: www.statecommissions.org.

Financial Reporting

10. Is it sufficient to have programs report Section I, II, and III totals rather than individual line items, as long as they are making their match? Won't this cause problems when the IG comes to audit expenditures, i.e. don't the auditors review on a line-by-line basis?
The minimal data collected on the FSR does not relieve programs from maintaining an accounting system that allows grantees and subgrantees to track their grant expenditures and maintain documentation to support all of them by line item and individual expenditure. When Commission and Corporation staff conduct financial monitoring visits and audits, they will look to see if the general ledger accounts support expenditures reported on the FSR and will sample indivudal transactions to ensure they are adequately supported and allowable.

11. Is it true that from now on grantees are not required to submit an aggregate FSR in eGrants?
No. Grantees will continue to submit an aggregate FSR (or Federal Financial Report after 10/1/08) in eGrants. Subgrantees are not currently required to submit any financial reports via eGrants. This will continue to be the case.

13. What is the single overall match that is included in the appropriation language?
The AmeriCorps appropriations law for 2008 eliminated the separate matches for Member Support and Program Operating Costs and replaced them with an overall match that starts at 24% and increases over 10 years of Federal funding to 50%.

14. (Commissions Only) Currently we make sure that all subgrantee expenditures are aligned with approved budget lines. Does the Corporation monitor the amounts in the subgrantee budget line items?
Monitoring subgrantee expenditures and financial management is the Commission's responsibility. The Corporation ensures State Competitive grant budgets are reasonable and in compliance during the application process only and relies on Commissions for financial oversight once grants are awarded.

15. (Commissions Only) Just as the Corporation limits cumulative change to 10% of the total budget without prior approval, we limit our subgrantees to a maximum of 10% for budget amendments between line items. Is this required?
The Corporation's grant provisions including regulations and OMB circulars that are incorporated by reference, apply to both grantees and sub-grantees. While the Corporation does not require the Commission to seek approval from the Corporation for changes at the subgrantee level if they don't result in an aggregate change at the grantee level, the Commission needs to approve changes at the subgrantee level if they exceed the 10% cumulative change in the subgrantee's budget. Only by tracking such changes at the subgrantee level, will Commissions know if they will exceed the 10% at the grantee level.

16. **(Commissions Only) I believe it has been stated that reasonable costs for developing our own systems will be accommodated in our administrative budget. How much is reasonable?**
We will contact you during the budget review process if the cost is deemed unreasonable. However, also please be aware that developing financial management systems independent of your state's accounting and subgrantee reporting systems would require double entry and increase the potential for errors.

<u>Progress Reporting</u>

17. **In the Demographic Reporting Elements (Section I of the GPR) you request estimates, not hard data. It might be helpful to put the word "estimated" into the definition so that the requirement will not be misinterpreted or made unrealistically stringent by individual state program officers.**
Your comment is in harmony with our rationale for allowing estimates. However, we are not going to include the word estimates in the definition, since it is included in the instructions.

18. **For what period do you want us to report the number of applicants?**
Beginning in December of 2007, you will be asked to report the number of applicants during the year that the GPR covers.

19. **In the demographic Item #2 "AmeriCorps Members" on "Disaster Preparedness and Response", can you replace the word "certified" and replace it with "formally trained" or some other variation?**
This language will remain unchanged. The Corporation is interested in capturing how many members receive formal certification from those who do have the authority to promulgate a certification or licensing process, rather than simply how many members receive training in disaster services.

20. **Are we to count the number of volunteers leveraged by all AmeriCorps programs, rather than by members only, as in the past?**
Yes. We are asking you to count all volunteers that have been leveraged using Corporation resources.

21. **Does the definition of certification for disaster response and recovery include basic CPR and First Aid training resulting in certification?**
Yes. This definition is intentionally left open to include different kinds of training leading to certification.

22. **May we assume that "Individuals Mentored" under "Populations Served" also includes children who are academically tutored on an intensive, one to one basis? You note that it does not include teachers - does it also not include tutors?**

Yes. The definition as presented includes tutors as long as they fit all the other criteria in the definition.

23. **Is there a definition of sustained that relates to dosage? For example, we run a program that addresses middle school youth suspended from school. Those youth work intensively for two weeks with our members then cycle out of the program. Is that considered sustained? Are meetings with individual high school students for career counseling (6 meetings per year) considered sustained?**
We are leaving the definition of sustained open to interpretation in order to cast a wide net, knowing that duration can be said to be sustained as well as frequency.

24. **Does the " Disaster Preparedness and Response" category under "Populations Served" include long-term restoration (such as in Katrina-affected areas), as well as immediate response?**
This indicator is intended to capture all AmeriCorps members who support disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and response regardless of the duration of their effort OR regardless of the length of time. It would include members who are focused on disaster full-time, as well as those that may respond for short periods of time in a response or on a recovery project.

25. **Will the Corporation expect to see reporting against all of the new demographic categories in the 2006-2007 report due in December of 2007, even though we have not been collecting them?**
Yes, the Corporation plans on asking for estimates of these demographic reporting elements in the report due in December of 2007 and thereafter. We are asking for these this year because we think that many grantees are already collecting them. Please remember that there is no penalty for reporting "0."

26. **In what cases would we enter "0," in other words, what is the cut off point?**
If you don't engage with the type of leveraged volunteer or service recipient at all, then enter "0." Otherwise, please estimate.

27. **Q: Will these demographic elements stay the same, or will they change in coming years?**
We will continue to request estimates of these elements until our strategic initiatives change as a result of the new strategic plan that will be developed in 2010.

28. **What should we be doing to protect privacy?**
We expect you protect the privacy of the people with whom you work, particularly at-risk populations. However, it is not our intention that you survey every volunteer that you leverage, hence our emphasis on estimates. The indicator on children of incarcerated parents addresses this by directing you to only count this indicator if your program focuses on this demographic and participants are specifically selected for participation by some other entity whose job it is to identify this population. We

are not instructing, and in fact discourage you from asking children if their parents are incarcerated or not.

29. Our subsites all submitted their APRs in WBRS already. What should we do about that?

You will summarize the information provided by your subsites in the new prime reporting screens in eGrants.

30. Will programs be able to report on the third and fourth quarter in WBRS?

This will depend on your program start and end dates. Programs will be able to do anything in WBRS that they can do now until September 30, 2008.

31. We were thinking of having our subgrantees report in Section 8 in the APR. Will it still aggregate in December?

WBRS functionality will stay exactly the same as it is now until September 30, 2008. If you want to have your subgrantees report their narratives in the WBRS "Great Stories," "Successes and Challenges," and "Comments" sections you can do so. You will have to summarize what they submit in the new prime reporting screens in eGrants.

32. The 2007-2008 performance measures are posted to the GPR in WBRS but the performance measures in eGrants will be the ones we entered when we applied. Can we do amendments to align performance measurements? What exactly will we see in eGrants?

You will see the performance measure title. If you made substantive changes in your performance measures during negotiations or thereafter, this should be reflected in eGrants performance measures that have been amended. If they were only changed in WBRS, then the performance measures that appear in the progress report may differ from your approved measures.

For the 2006-2007 report due in December of 2007, report on approved performance measures to the best of your ability, regardless of how they appear in eGrants. If a performance measure appears that has been deleted from WBRS, mark it as "Ongoing" so as not to affect the aggregate result. Next year, this problem will be solved since amendments will occur in the same system in which the performance measures are entered, and pulled directly into your reporting forms.

33. Can we edit the performance measures in eGrants?

No, we are not requiring that you amend performance measures in eGrants to make them align with WBRS for the report due in December of 2007. The only way the performance measures can be edited in eGrants is through a formal amendment.

<u>Member Management</u>

34. What about the 10% fundraising limitation—will that still have to be tracked on an individual level?

Yes, it will still have to be tracked, however there are fewer members that are engaged in fundraising, so the burden of tracking individuals should be much less.

35. **The My AmeriCorps portal is not up and running yet and we have members enrolling now—will we have to enroll them again in the My AmeriCorps portal?**
No, in fact, members enrolled before the My AmeriCorps portal is live are all already enrolled in the database that underlies the portal. The new My AmeriCorps portal is basically a front end or user interface which overlays the SPAN database. There is no need to transfer data as there was from WBRS to SPAN.

36. **Will any member information transfer over from WBRS to the My AmeriCorps portal?**
Information that is critical to the education award is downloaded to the Trust database from WBRS on a weekly basis now. When the new portal goes live, programs will still have access to all information that is currently in the Trust. Members will be able to see more than they can now. Everyone will have to exit through the portal once the portal goes live.

37. **Once the portal goes live will we be able to run reports on 30 day compliance?**
Yes.

38. **Is there going to be a way so we can find out how many members from each site have used their ed award?**
Yes.

39. **Can subsites get reports from the My AmeriCorps portal?**
This is a function currently unavailable in WBRS. We have added it to the list of desired features but it is not yet clear if this will be built into the My AmeriCorps portal. We will let EAPs, in particular, know as soon as we know if this is feasible.

40. **Who enrolls the new member in the portal, the university (subsite) or the Compact (National parent)?**
This depends on where the authority to enroll resides in your particular program. If subsites do the enrolling now, they will be able to continue to do so. If you enroll all members at the parent level, the system will allow you to continue enrolling at that level.

    The enrollment function will work a little differently than it did in WBRS. If a new member uses the AmeriCorps Online Recruiting System, all of their data will already be in the portal. When a subsite or parent organization decides to accept the member, they will issue an electronic invitation to enroll. Once the member accepts the grantee's invitation, and completes the enrollment form, the subsite or parent approves and they are enrolled. If a new member does not use the AmeriCorps Online Recruiting System, the program will have to enter a limited amount of member information into the portal in order to issue the invitation.

41. **If a member does not apply online, will there be an alternative method for programs to enroll them?**
Yes.

42. **Will programs still be held to the 30 day requirement for enrollment?**
Yes.

43. **We are a large multi-state, multi-site EAP program. We use WBRS for program management. Couldn't we work out a way for grantees who want to keep on using WBRS to keep on using it?**
We understand your concern and recognize that large multi-site programs have a different set of program management challenges than smaller grantees, and we know that WBRS has been a useful tool. We will continue to tease out the underlying issues and challenges in the program management area and work with you to find solutions. However, our main goal is to collect only the information that is necessary, and to store it all in one place. If you were to continue to use WBRS for program management, you would have to re-enter information into eGrants, creating unnecessary burden and margin for error.

We are exploring commercial products and products that are available as shareware to give you some tools to use. So, we are focusing on suggesting ways to solve the policy issues first, and making sure everyone will be in compliance. Then we will focus on program management issues, and will work with a smaller group that is most affected by the transition on these issues.