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Resource Center



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Starting Off Right: Corporation for National Service Programs

By Edward Doty and Margaret Hawthorne Doty, Program Consultants, Catholic Network of Volunteer Service

As a new program director, you are probably very optimistic about the potential success of your project. But many programs set themselves up for problems or even failure before their first member or participant is ever enrolled. All national service programs, no matter what stream, face common challenges. You can successfully meet and avoid most mistakes with proper starting procedures, maximizing your new program's chances for success.

There are five basic steps to take before you are ready to begin your program. Each of these areas must be addressed and procedures put in place before your program begins. Otherwise, you will end up fighting your own lack of organization for months to come.

1 • Know the Corporation's Rules

It sounds obvious, but your first task is to know, inside and out, the rules that govern the type of program you are starting. For example, Education Awards programs have different reporting

requirements than traditional AmeriCorps programs. Traditional AmeriCorps members emphasize direct service while AmeriCorps* VISTA members focus on capacity building. The Senior Service Experience Corps can use skills other streams don't have access to. And many Learn and Serve America programs deal with the unique aspects of working with young people. Know the schedule and reporting requirements for required hours of service, evaluations and any other relevant paperwork. Know exactly what benefits members receive, and what the requirements are for receiving those benefits. Know the activities in which your members may and may not engage. This knowledge is essential as you plan the details of your program.

Grant provisions and regulations are available on the website for the Corporation for National Service (www.nationalservice.org) under Resources for Programs (look under the relevant program), or from your state commission or Corporation for National Service state office.

See *Starting Off Right*, page 4

Editor's Box: Start-Up of a National Service Program

This issue focuses on the important first steps in starting up a national service program. In articles from across the different streams of service, contributors provide a catalog of the issues and concerns new program directors and staff must face in preparing for and launching their programs.

The issue kicks off with a discussion of the five basic steps of program start-up, which is supplemented by separate articles on the critical components of financial management, recruitment, building a network, and supervision (including supervisor training). Two

more articles zero in on special concerns of service-learning and literacy programs.

A Program Start-Up Blueprint organizes the different aspects of start-up in a timeline that can serve as a practical tool and reference guide for new program staff.

Finally, we provide a list of publications available through the NSRC website and lending library, which provide further information on many of the principal components of start-up, from member recruitment, training and development to supervision and sustainability.

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Orientation Outline for AmeriCorps* VISTA Site Supervisors

I. Program Overview

Present the big picture of national service and your organization and ensure that each site understands its place in your organizational structure.

1. National service overview: History of national service, VISTA, Corporation for National Service.

2. Streams of service: Cover the Corporation for National Service's organizational chart and explain the different streams of service (SOS) and programs under the Corporation's umbrella, with an emphasis on the organizational structure in your state. Explain where SOS paths might cross and the role of the state commission versus the Corporation state office.

3. History and mission of the sponsor organization and its connection to national service.

II. AmeriCorps* VISTA Terms and Conditions

Review the basic terms and conditions of AmeriCorps* VISTA service. It never hurts to repeat these for those supervisors who have already attended a pre-service orientation (PSO). Enlist them as your allies in keeping the member accountable to the team and their work focused on the goal of capacity building.

The Key to Supervisory Success

By Lisa Guccione, AmeriCorps* VISTA Program Director, Community and Economic Development Office, Burlington, Vermont

Note: Though these guidelines were written for AmeriCorps* VISTA site supervisors, they may be applicable to other streams of service.

The old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is certainly true when it comes to preparing AmeriCorps* VISTA site supervisors for a year of hosting a national service member. The Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) in Burlington, Vermont, has learned this lesson, and it has developed a detailed orientation and training plan for setting up both site supervisors and members for success.

The city of Burlington has been sponsoring AmeriCorps* VISTA members for seven years. In that time CEDO has grown from coordinating five members in 1993 to the current program, which includes 54 members working in two distinct teams. The 27-member community development team focuses its efforts in Vermont's most densely populated low-income area, Burlington's Old North End Enterprise Community. CEDO also manages a statewide America Reads literacy initiative that includes 27 members working to ensure that all children read well and independently by grade three. With only one program director, two AmeriCorps* VISTA leaders, and AmeriCorps* VISTA members placed in city and state government agencies, schools, universities and nonprofit agencies, CEDO needed a generic, yet thorough supervisor orientation.

The underlying premise in building a strong program is to establish and maintain close relationships with the site supervisors who are guiding your AmeriCorps* VISTA members on a daily basis. The key is for supervisors to see themselves as much a part of the national service family as the members.

Following are some tips that will help you design a supervisor orientation and training plan that will provide a solid foundation in the national service culture with an emphasis on prevention as a tool for success.

 Remember that most site supervisors will supervise an AmeriCorps* VISTA member as a small part of their duties. Although it is important to set high standards and expectations for the quality of time and energy that they give to members, you can make their

job easier and help them stay organized by keeping them as informed as possible. The advance planning and preparation required will be hard work, but it is well worth the effort. We have learned to err on the side of providing the sites with too much information. Here are some examples of information to provide:

- Before the member begins, provide site supervisors with a written list of the distinct responsibilities of the sponsor agency staff or program director, the AmeriCorps* VISTA leaders (if you have them), site supervisors and members.
- Distribute team rosters, a list of site descriptions, and program overview materials so that site supervisors can familiarize themselves with the work of the program and know how to contact their counterparts and those doing similar work.
- Develop a public relations flyer that includes your program mission, a description of the sponsor agency, the program goals and objectives, and past successes. This quick reference, which can be used for both sites and the media, will help supervisors easily explain their relationship to national service.
- Ensure that supervisors as well as members are aware of reporting requirements well in advance. Help them decide what to count and let them know what you will do with that information. Provide a mid-year and end-of-year summary of accomplishments to help them recognize their place in the larger effort.
- As early as possible, send sites a schedule of team meetings, training, check-ins, service projects, and reporting deadlines. We provide supervisors with a tentative schedule for the first six months at the beginning of the program and then send members and supervisors monthly updates with a simple bulletin and calendar.
- Don't let geographic distance prevent you from communicating regularly with supervisors. If you are unable to meet face to face, set up a listserv, use interactive TV, and hold regional meetings or conference calls.

III. Administrative Review

Review the program and fiscal information needed to run a successful program.

1. Corporation project application: Give a reminder that the workplan is a working document and should be used to orient and guide new members.
2. Financial agreements: Provide clarity on travel and training reimbursement processes and cost-share agreements, if applicable; review the terms, conditions and process for the stipend and education award; provide a schedule for pay periods; and explain who to call with questions on the living allowance.
3. Reporting expectations and paperwork.
4. Timeline/annual calendar: Explain which training, service projects, and team meetings are required and which are optional.

IV. Roles/Responsibilities

Review the different roles and responsibilities carried out by Corporation staff, program staff, site supervisors and members.

V. Recruitment

If you will be coordinating member recruitment and placement, make sure that site supervisors are clear on the process and timeline, including a review of relevant deadlines and enrollment paperwork.

- Most importantly, ensure that every piece of group information (every memo, e-mail, bulletin, agenda and calendar) that you share with the members is also sent to the site supervisors. We have learned that, despite being in the same building, the same department and the same office, mail somehow does not always get shared.

Recognize that many AmeriCorps*VISTA supervisors have tremendous skills and experience in their field of expertise, but they may have had little or no training in supervisory skills. You may need to help them understand the unique position that AmeriCorps*VISTA members play in their agency.

- Sites are most successful when the supervisor not only integrates the AmeriCorps*VISTA member into the agency staff (by including him or her in staff meetings, for example) but also makes a commitment to the professional and personal development of that member. More coaching and training may be necessary for AmeriCorps*VISTA members than for other staff. Supervising national service members, simply put, takes more time. If you can give supervisors an accurate sense of how much time each week they should be spending on check-ins and project guidance, you will help them and their fellow staff be ready to bring a member onto their team.
- Provide supervisors with the same training needs assessment that you use for your members. Ask them to rate the training needs for members in order to help you design member training. Invite them to participate as learners in any of the workshops you offer for members. Include them as trainers for your member workshops and Early Service Training. Ask for their feedback on the impact that the training has had on the members' work. All of this will help them become more invested in the team's identity and ensure that you, as a program manager, have a clear sense of the success of your member development plan.

- Ask supervisors if there is any training that they need to be more successful in working with AmeriCorps*VISTA members. Workshops on topics such as giving productive feedback, coaching, and adult learning styles may be well received.

Give site supervisors all the information they will need to get started before the member arrives at the pre-service orientation. One way to accomplish this is to develop a formal training program (see "Orientation Outline" sidebar).

Help new supervisors to interact with their peers. If possible, try to develop a formal mentoring relationship between your new supervisors and your veteran supervisors. At the very least, you will want to provide a forum where veteran site supervisors and second-year members are invited to share suggestions, experiences, and effective practices, and answer questions from new supervisors.

With advance thought and personal attention to site supervisors, you will be able to create a national service network throughout your host sites. The sense of team spirit that you work so hard to instill in your members will carry over to supervisors. And ultimately, the goal of placing members in projects that value the member and the national service resource that they are getting will be much more easily achieved. Invested and informed site supervisors make for a good experience for your members and will be your best tool in the fight to get things done. ■

For more information, contact Lisa Guccione at (802) 865-7547 or lguccione@aol.com.

Starting Off Right: Corporation for National Service Programs

(continued from page 1)

2• Explain Your Mission

Articulating your mission is not as easy as it sounds. You probably had a variety of personal reasons for initiating the program, from dissatisfaction with what you were doing before to the desire to address a local community need while accessing a larger support network. However, your reasons may not be ones that will motivate anyone else to pursue program goals. You need to come up with a clear, concise mission statement that will compel other stakeholders—members, participants, volunteers, site supervisors, program directors and support staff—to share your purpose and promote it effectively. Write it down! If you do not put it in writing, chances are you will vary your mission statement to suit the occasion, and different stakeholders will end up with different concepts of your organization's goal.

3• Develop Organizational Systems

The primary organizational systems that need to be in place as you begin are the methods for keeping track of member activities, your calendar and any funds you receive from the Corporation. Make sure you know exactly what information must be kept. Review samples of reporting forms for similar Corporation-funded programs to be sure you keep track of all information you will need to report to the Corporation. Then, make sure you know when each form and report must be filed to keep your program on track for every stakeholder. The calendar needs to include dates for member enrollment, orientation, activities, reporting requirements and completion. (Financial reporting is addressed elsewhere in this newsletter.)

You should also start planning for assessment of your program. Use the goals and objectives from your grant application to determine the assessments you will need during the year. Ensuring your methods of data collection are in place from the beginning will make it easier to evaluate the results of your program at the end of the year.

4• Orient Everyone

Every stakeholder needs to be oriented to the mission and methods of your new program. Don't make the mistake of thinking that everyone else understands what you're trying to do if you haven't told them explicitly. You need separate orientations for different kinds of participants, whether they are site supervisors, staff, volunteers, members or others. Even if a category contains only one or two people, plan and execute a full orientation to maximize ownership of your program and to make sure protocols will be followed. Lack of understanding of requirements can cause people to take shortcuts into prohibited areas or leave you without information you need to report to the Corporation.

5• Build a Support Network

Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Go to as many conferences as you can and get to know others with similar programs. Join the listservs relevant to your program and participate in the discussions by asking questions and sharing your opinions and knowledge. Use the technical assistance services offered by the Corporation. Take every opportunity to make connections with other program directors. Ask them what experiences they have had and how they solved the problems they encountered. The more extensive a support network you can establish, the better chance you will have to address and correct problems in your program as they arise.

The ultimate success of your program will depend on a wide variety of factors, some of which you can control and some of which you can't. But you can get off on the right track by taking these five steps before enrolling your members or recruiting other participants. Knowing what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how to keep track of what's been done, then ensuring that the other people involved in your program know the same, are key to starting a strong program. ■

For training and technical assistance in program start-up, contact Karen Stran at 1-800-543-5046 or kstran@cnvs.org.

T/TA Master Calendar

This is a calendar of events, conferences and meetings of interest to programs in national service. To find out what's happening, visit www.etr.org/nsrc/calendar.html.

Building a Strong Peer Network

By Mark Fulop, Program Director, National Service Resource Center, ETR Associates

Does This Scenario Sound Familiar?

I am a new program director—actually, I have been in the position for about seven weeks. When I became a director, I didn't receive any training and, as a new director, I sure could have used some. If it were not for the Director's Handbook, I would be completely in the dark about what I should be doing. It is uncomfortable to be left to form my own interpretation of what is in the handbook, and at times I am really uncertain which way to turn. I still have questions, so I rely on other directors who have offered their assistance to me. Recently I had the opportunity to attend a state conference, and I heard other new directors complaining about having no idea what they were supposed to be doing as directors. I also heard that, like me, they felt that they did not have the basics for how to do their jobs as directors. I love this work, but no one said it would be easy!

Can you find yourself in this story? Whether it was years ago or today, we have all had to confront the issues of getting a new program off the ground. When you're a new director, or even an "old" director starting a new program, the work is challenging at the best of times and overwhelming at the worst of times. New directors and programs are expected to start up fast—often with little direction or knowledge of where to turn for answers. This article focuses on using peer networks and mentoring as important sources of answers to your start-up questions.

We all have experienced the value of getting advice or direction from those who know more about a subject than we do. But have we made getting peer advice a priority for project management? Creating an intentional strategy to develop a mentoring relationship will help us grow professionally. Mentoring is the backbone of many national service projects, ranging from Learn and Serve projects to local Foster Grandparent initiatives. As leaders, we should use mentoring not only as a program strategy, but as a key feature of our peer networks. Peer mentoring and networking are critical to our awareness that none of us are in this alone. Even if you are located in a small, isolated community, there are many ways that you can get connected to your peers.

So, Where Do I Start?

Make the time. The most important lesson to learn about networking is that it must be a high-enough priority for us to make time to do it. Schedule networking on your calendar right between "staff meeting" and "write progress report."

Get wired. The National Service Resource Center (NSRC) hosts a number of program-specific electronic discussion groups (listservs) for the Corporation for National Service (see Join the Conversation). Several of these groups will connect you to over 500 other program directors and members. To join the listservs, you'll need a computer connected to the Internet.

Collect and give away business cards. The old practice of exchanging business cards is still a critical one for networking. If you were asked to name the most important thing in your office other than your computer and phone, would you reply "my business card Rolodex"? If not, then you are probably under-utilizing your professional network. Who we know is probably more important to solving problems than what we know. A great tip when you are meeting new people is to make a few quick notes about them on the back of their business cards, and then follow up with a quick note to start nurturing a professional relationship.

Know what you don't know, then ask. Asking someone to mentor you because you are new and don't know anything might sound as if you are asking that person for unlimited access to their time and energy. On the other hand, if you figure out what you don't know, it is easier to ask for help. So, instead of asking for open access to a mentor's time, focus on something more specific. For example, instead of saying "I am new and don't know anything," it might be better to ask, "It seems like you have a lot of experience in managing interpersonal conflicts among volunteers, so could I call you if I ever need some advice on this topic?"

Create a learning club. Another approach to networking is to create a learning club. If you know a few other new directors and maybe one or two more seasoned ones, you could create an informal learning club to exchange resources regarding a topic or topics by e-mail or conference call.

See Building a Strong Peer Network, page 8

Effective Practices Information Center (Epicenter)

Epicenter is an online database of effective practices for national service programs. You can search the database to find out what's working for others in national service, or contribute your own effective practice. Visit www.nationalservice.org/resources/epicenter to explore the database.

Program Start-Up Blueprint

By Cole McMahon, Director of Training and Technical Assistance, Maryland Governor's Office on Substance Abuse

Two-three months prior to the start of the year:

Site Partnerships

- Hold focus meeting with each site.
- Meet individually with each site supervisor to determine needs, objectives, member roles.
- Develop program calendar.
- Plan orientation for site partners.

Recruitment

- Research possible outlets for recruitment, e.g., community fairs, the media, or colleges.
- Identify target member population and resources.
- Create marketing materials, such as flyers, brochures, newspaper and radio ads, and a website.
- Spread the word! Go to fairs, visit colleges, post flyers.
- Develop and publish service descriptions.
- Post information about your program on the AmeriCorps Recruitment and Placement System (www.americorps.org/resources/).

Member Development

- Assess needs for member orientation by talking to former members, site supervisors, and other national service programs.
- Brainstorm training topics and formulate goals for orientation.
- Plan and design member orientation.
- Develop budget for member orientation.
- Read *Starting Strong: A Guide to Pre-Service Training* and other resource materials on training (see "Library Spotlight," page 10).

Policies and Procedures

- Read grant provisions and the Program Director's Handbook.
- Begin interviews, reference checks and hiring for staff positions.
- Develop forms, such as service-hour tracking forms, member contracts, member handbook, grievance procedure, and monitoring and reporting.
- Order and purchase office supplies, member gear and AmeriCorps handbooks.
- Subscribe to a national service listserv.

One month prior to the start of the year:

- Conduct orientation for site partners, including a review of policies, prohibited activities, service descriptions and reporting procedures.
- Create formal Memorandum of Understanding with site partners.

- Develop interview form and procedures.
- Set and begin interviews (two per member) with program staff and host site.
- Begin reference and criminal background checks.

- Arrange for logistics, such as meeting space and food; assign tasks to staff.
- Contact trainers: Call your commission, board, outside trainers, community colleges, etc.
- Collaborate with other national service programs or partner sites.
- Arrange for transportation and child care.

- Once members have been selected, send them info packets and request documents needed for your files, such as W-4s, driver's licenses, diplomas, and birth certificates.
- Help out-of-state members find affordable housing by networking with other programs or arrange for temporary housing for their first month.
- Review proposal and set up evaluation mechanism.

Budget/Fiscal

- Review budget
- Obtain funds to provide cash match (if applicable).
- Set up payroll for staff and members.
- Develop accounting system to capture program expenditures (CNS and match).
- Calculate grantee share and invoice.
- Calculate in-kind for sites.
- Prepare member orientation budget.

- Train sites on documenting in-kind match (if applicable).
- Develop bidding procedures.
- Select health care provider.

Site Partnerships

- Ensure each service site plans an orientation for members.

One week before start of the year:

- Meet with members and site supervisors to set goals and ease the start-up process.

First month of program year:

- Obtain feedback from sites through written evaluations or monthly meetings.
- Monitor sites through regular site visits and meetings with key staff.
- Share program successes with partners.

Ongoing during the year:

Recruitment

- Send welcome letter to new members.

- Finalize orientation logistics.
- Rehearse trainings.
- Hold prospective member social event.

- Hold member orientation.
- Help members to get bearings for qualified loans.
- Plan ongoing development: set dates for regular team meetings, trainings, service projects, celebration, and reflection.

- Survey members on training needs.
- Conduct mid-year and end-of-year performance evaluations.
- Meet monthly with members individually and as a team.
- Arrange for post-service planning, such as résumé writing or job shadows.

Do you remember your first weeks in the national service field? The learning curve is steepest when it matters most. Getting started demands a high level of organization, effort and knowledge, especially at the program level. Unfortunately, many national service programs and new program directors struggle through their first year.

To ensure a high level of effectiveness right from the start, 100 new program directors prepared the ultimate program start-up blueprint. At the Atlantic Cluster New Program Directors Orientation (September 6-8, 2000, in Linthicum, Maryland) these intrepid program directors met in small groups to identify the tasks needed to be effective in each phase of a start-up. The groups merged their efforts

Member Development

- Monitor member files to see what still needs to be turned in.

- Enter members into WBRS.
- Set up schedule of due dates for reports (both fiscal and program).
- Implement evaluation mechanism.

- Enter member hours into WBRS.
- Keep members informed of hours.
- Timely submission of reports (both fiscal and program).
- Prepare and submit exit paperwork.

Policies and Procedures

- Enroll members in health care plan.
- Enroll eligible members in AmeriCorps* CARE.

- Set up schedule of due dates for reports (both fiscal and program).
- Set up format and times for meeting to review budgets versus actual expenditures.

- Regular monitoring of budget versus actual expenditures.
- Monitoring of match in budget versus actual reported.
- Timely submission of reports (both fiscal and program).

Budget/Fiscal

into one document, which others in the field have enhanced with their ideas and contributions. The above blueprint and checklist is the result. Pull it out of the newsletter and post it on the wall. Make copies and pass it out at your next New Program Directors Meeting. Ask for contributions, make changes, and send it back to us.

One word of caution to new programs and new staff: This is not the only way to get started, nor is it likely any one program will be able to accomplish everything on this list. While timelines in national service tend to be short, there is no substitute for long-term planning and preparation to make things work smoothly. Where possible, prepare for a start-up long before the three-month window presented here.

Start-Up Challenge: Recruitment for the Young Fathers Project

By Laine Renfro Sedillo, Executive Director, New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition

The New Mexico Young Fathers Project began in 1999, with funding from the Office of Population Affairs and its collaborative partners: Planned Parenthood of New Mexico and the Father & Family Center. The program received funding to develop and provide a multifaceted educational program to address the needs of young parenting males at 10 teen parent sites across the state. One of the biggest start-up challenges was recruitment of AmeriCorps members. Through the process of recruitment, program staff learned some valuable lessons:

■ **Position descriptions help you recruit the “right” members.** In the New Mexico Young Fathers Project, members needed to be male with at least two years of college, experience in health education or social work, and experience in male involvement activities (such as Boy Scouts). Without a clear position description, you can waste a lot of energy recruiting members who are not qualified for your program. A comprehensive position description is essential to help you focus your recruiting efforts.

■ **Recruiting is best done locally.** Although websites and e-mail discussion groups can be good places to advertise for interns, most recruitment involves the local media and traditional “low tech” ways of networking within the community. Start with local colleges and vocational schools or other places where the types of members you are looking for might be found. Also, use other AmeriCorps members to help get the word out about your project. Personal recruitment seems to work well.

■ **Network with other AmeriCorps sites on a coordinated recruitment strategy.** If several programs in your area are recruiting members, share position descriptions and member applications. A member not suited for one placement may be perfect for another.

■ **Be prepared for lots of paperwork.** Even though some of it is computerized, there are lots of documents to read, forms to complete, and reports to submit.

■ **Once you find members, invest heavily in them.** Members are in it not for the money but for the experience and sense of purpose they gain. Start the members off right with a well-

designed pre-service orientation that builds the ethic of service, unifies the team, and gives them the knowledge they need to begin service. Setting clear expectations in the beginning will reduce confusion and misunderstandings later in the year. After pre-service orientation, train your members thoroughly and often, since they have a lot of desire, but not as much technical expertise as you might expect.

■ **Seek to learn about the skills members already have.** Members may possess skills and knowledge that you do not know about. Try to build upon the unanticipated skills of members in ways that strengthen the program efforts.

■ **Don’t let the small stuff get you down.** Recruiting is hard work, and there is no way around the time and effort it takes to recruit good members. But if the details of recruitment start to get you down, take some time to remember the big picture: careful recruiting will ultimately increase the success of your program. ■

For more information, contact Laine Renfro Sedillo at nmtpc@flash.net or Carl Dellinger, Planned Parenthood of New Mexico, at dellinger@aol.com.

Building a Strong Peer Network

(continued from page 5)

Give back to your network. A final principle: Always give back to your network. As you gain experience, you will have more experience to share, and in a couple of years you will no longer be the “new kid” on the block. Then, it will be your turn to provide support when a new director says, “Help, I don’t know anything! Where can I turn?”

There are two approaches when starting out as a new director. The first is to go it alone, struggle to find resources, and when things go wrong, blame it on lack of preparation or proper training. The second approach is to intentionally develop and nurture professional relationships, ask for help, and, whenever possible, establish more formal mentoring relationships. Though we may still struggle at times, this second approach will give us a broader network for support, because we are all in this work together. ■

Financial Management for New Programs

By Corland Forrester, CPA, Walker & Company

We all know the proverbs “A stitch in time saves nine” and “If something is worth doing, it’s worth doing right the first time.” These two adages should be held closely by program directors and other stakeholders of new programs as they begin the process of setting up their operations. “Doing it right” means implementing strong financial controls to accurately manage a program’s operations. A program may have a good mission and a great plan for carrying it out, but the program can fail if good financial management is lacking. As you begin to develop your program’s financial management system, consider the following essential activities for the start-up and operation of a successful program.

Start-Up Activities

1. Know the rules you must follow while administering your grant. These rules may include the Corporation’s grant provisions that apply to your specific grant, state guidelines for the location(s) of your operations (which may be obtained from your state commission or office), and federal guidelines based on your type of organization. The federal regulations are found in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars. OMB circulars that may apply to your organization (see sidebar) can be found at www.whitehouse.gov/OMB/circulars/index.html.

2. Design internal controls to manage your operations. These controls should include procedures for the following:

- Approving program expenditures
- Ensuring all expenditures are recorded in the financial records
- Reviewing and approving timesheets of members and staff, as appropriate
- Preparing financial and programmatic reports
- Segregating activities performed by employees to develop a system of checks and balances (for example, make sure the same employee does not open the mail, deposit checks and record the transactions in the financial system)

3. Document through written policies and procedures the internal controls that are designed to manage your operations.

4. Design your accounting system with separate cost centers to segregate the activities for:

- Grant expenditures that are reimbursed by the Corporation for National Service
- Matching expenditures, if applicable
- Other non-federal-related expenditures

5. Take a careful look at the financial capacity of your organization to provide cash (for members’ support) and other operating matches, which can be cash or in-kind support.

Operating Activities

1. Set up a payroll process for members and staff. Ensure that applicable taxes are withheld from members’ living allowances, if applicable.

2. Review program goals against your budget and compare to actual expenditures.

3. Prepare Periodic Expense Reports (PER) and Financial Status Reports (FSR) in a timely manner.

4. Ensure that policies and procedures are being followed.

5. Ensure that the program expenditures are being approved by the appropriate person and that these expenditures are reported accurately.

6. Ensure that the matching requirements are being met. Member support match should be met every quarter and operating match by the end of the program year.

7. Document your expenditures so that (1) they can be easily traced to the source documentation; and (2) it is clearly indicated how these expenditures were necessary for your program’s operation.

History has taught us that when programs fail to implement strong financial management controls, they invite intentional or unintentional fiscal problems that can result in a program losing funds. The lack of financial controls can also result in negative audit findings. This can require an organization to pay back funds to the federal government or risk not having the program renewed. If you implement good fiscal controls early in your program’s life, you won’t have to deal with the negative consequences of not having them later on. ■

For technical assistance with financial management, contact Corland Forrester toll-free at 1-877-363-9300 or ceforrester@walkerllp.com.

Relevant OMB Circulars

State and Local Government, Tribes:

A-102
A-87
A-133

Higher Education:

A-110
A-21
A-133

Nonprofit:

A-110
A-122
A-133

Library Spotlight: Program Start-Ups

Corporation for National Service programs may check out these and other items from our Library Catalog by contacting Bernadette Perez:

Phone:
800-860-2684, ext.260

TDD:
831-461-0205

Fax:
831-430-9471

Website:
www.etr.org/nsrc/library.html

Address:
NSRC/ETR Associates
P.O. Box 1830
Santa Cruz, CA
95061-1830

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America Reads: Principles and Key Components for High Quality America Reads National Service Program Initiatives

Corporation for National Service, 1997
8 pages,R0688
Describes guidelines for integrating America Reads initiatives into national service programs and the standards of quality tutoring activities.

AmeriCorps Education Awards Programs: Starting Strong and Staying on Track

Catholic Network of Volunteer Service
Approximately 150 pages,R1636
Sections on CNS requirements, start-up tips, member recruitment and orientation, site supervisor resources, program monitoring, site management, and training and technical assistance.

AmeriCorps*VISTA Supervisor's Manual

92 pages,R0730
Assists supervisors with issues like project development,member recruitment,project implementation,and member administration.

Becoming a Better Senior Corps Supervisor

National Crime Prevention Council
120 pages,R1457
Gives supervisors techniques for active listening, coaching, and managing conflict. Describes self-assessment and time-management methods.

Becoming a Better Supervisor: A Resource Guide for Community Service Supervisors

143 pages,C0096
Illustrates the many roles of a supervisor; includes readings, assessment tools, and checklists.

Complete Guide to Learning through Community Service: Grades K-9

Lillian S. Stephens
235 pages,C0111
How to establish a service-learning program: integrating curriculum according to age, course of study, and planned duration.

Essential Elements of Service-Learning for Effective Practice and Organizational Support

National Service-Learning Cooperative
34 pages,M0791
Includes an introduction to service-learning, a description of the essential elements of effective service-learning practices and how to apply them.

Getting Things Started: The AmeriCorps Orientation Video

8 minutes,V0156
Overview of AmeriCorps for those beginning their year of service. Describes the mission of AmeriCorps, the history of national service, and what it means to be an AmeriCorps member.

1995-6 Idaho TRIO AmeriCorps Member Calendar-Journal

150 pages,W0035
Helps members record, focus, and organize their goals and work for the next year. Each month contains a calendar with time-card deadlines. Space for weekly journal entries for recording work and for writing success stories is provided.

Practical Applications: Strategies for Supporting a Diverse Corps

38 pages,R0685
Strategies for encouraging and promoting diversity in AmeriCorps programs. Addresses recruitment and retention of members, assessment policies, training and skill development, and dealing with group conflicts.

Programming for Impact National Toolkit

Angela Roberts,ed.
Approximately 200 pages,K0565
Reference manual, learning tool, and guide for Senior Corps project directors. Sections include project administration, working with volunteer stations,advisory councils,and tools for community needs,data collection,and measurement.

Seniors for Schools Effective Practices Guidebook

National Senior Service Corps
350 pages,R1453
How to initiate and sustain a senior service literacy program in schools: recruiting and training volunteers, building partnerships, choosing a literacy model, community outreach, and program administration and evaluation.

Starting Strong: A Guide to Pre-Service Training

MOSAICA, Washington, D.C.1996
595 pages,R0135
Provides information on what type of pre-service training is appropriate for specific programs. Also available at www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/startstrong/starting.html. Disk of activities can be ordered at no charge from NSRC.*

Literacy Projects: Start-Up Issues and Concerns

Note: The following is an excerpt from the *Seniors for Schools Effective Practices Guidebook*, Chapter One, “Common Start-Up Issues and Concerns.” For more information on establishing a literacy program, refer to the guidebook (available from the NSRC lending library, page 10).

As project directors, there are many factors to be considered when establishing a literacy program. This article highlights common concerns and problem areas identified by Seniors for Schools project directors themselves. It offers you a starting point for finding your own approach and solutions.

Beginning a New Literacy Initiative

As a new project director, you may feel overwhelmed with the task set before you and have some hesitancy in knowing how and where to begin. Do not hesitate to seek help as you launch a new initiative, or continue to develop an existing program. You have many resources for information and problem-solving, beginning with the Corporation for National Service in Washington, D.C. Consult your sponsor organization and school partners as well. Keep them abreast of issues and activities. The more you involve others in your project, the broader your foundation for the project will be. Seek advice and assistance as often as you need it.

Administering a Grant Authored by Someone Else

Frequently the author of your program’s grant is a writer, not a project director or manager. The author may have identified key goals, objectives and implementation procedures that you have not had a role in designing. It is okay and often necessary to tweak goals and objectives to fit a more realistic and manageable timeline and milestones for your project. You may amend the written goals and objectives based on your knowledge of your program and goals.

Securing Staff to Administer the Project

When projects are selected, there must be qualified people available to do everything from helping answer the phones when recruitment calls begin to come in, to assisting with financial matters regarding the new grant. Thus, project directors often must move quickly to secure new staff that can help administer the project.

Expect an adjustment period for organizing any new project, but plan for staffing early in your preparations. Your sponsor agency may have staff who are able to help you out. Ask advice from your sponsor. They are already established in the community and will be a valuable resource for information and ideas for getting things done. They also fund your program and will be able to identify what the budget resources are for hiring support staff.

How to Communicate Your Project’s Needs to a School Principal

When a project is new and lacks a track record, project directors can sometimes feel reluctant and uncomfortable being up-front and direct when identifying project needs and expectations for the school’s role. Develop a partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with each school. (Samples are available at the LEARNS website: www.nwrel.org/learns.) Outline what will be provided by your project, and by the school. Also establish a timeline for meeting obligations and benchmarks for measuring the success of the partnership. This will provide a shared understanding of expectations.

How Much Time and What Topics Are Essential to Volunteer Orientation and Training?

There are so many things that project directors feel are important for volunteers to know and understand about their work. This is increasingly true for projects working in literacy and education.

Recognize first of all that your project is unique. There will be similarities in projects, but no two projects are exactly the same, nor are their needs the same. Look to other projects for examples, survey your volunteers and find out what knowledge they feel they’re lacking and look to your partner schools to be resources as well. Schools using particular reading models or approaches will most likely want to provide some sort of training to volunteers. Create a training outline or training plan for the year.

Remember, not every topic can be covered during the initial orientation period. Build in trainings throughout the year, and make these trainings relevant to the needs of the children, volunteers and overall project goals.

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Starting Smart in Service-Learning

By Bob Seidel, Department of Service-Learning, Corporation for National Service

Many of the ideas about start-up in AmeriCorps and Senior Corps also apply to Learn and Serve America programs. There are, however, a few key points that are essential, if not specific, to service-learning programs:

- Make sure that your goals and objectives address adequately both participant learning outcomes and community service outcomes. It's crucial that your program find ways to make these categories of objectives mutually supportive rather than competitive.
- Involve diverse participants in defining goals, objectives, and methods as early as possible. Students, faculty, administrators, and other community members who have a stake in what the program does should all have meaningful representation as early as is practical.
- Work on program evaluation from Day One. Your concern for long-term success of your program, as well as meaningful outcomes for all stakeholders, should mean that you integrate process evaluation and outcomes assessment into your initial work on goals and objectives. If this is not an area of expertise for you, seek assistance from appropriate training and technical assistance providers.

There are important reasons for, and multiple facets to, all three of these points. Addressed well, they can empower participants, make service as appropriate and meaningful as possible, help focus on similarities and differences among participants and other community members, and stimulate creativity and energy.

Throughout the program activity, participants (students, faculty, administrators, and other community members) should reflect on what needs doing, why, what skills and tools are necessary, who should be involved, relevant aspects of the culture of the community, and other issues. Throughout the activity, organized reflection can address what works, what doesn't, what to do differently, which early expectations have proven true, which ones haven't, and many other issues. Such reflection—which can integrate group discussion, writing assignments, and a host of other methods—can benefit both participant learning and community outcomes. ■

For additional information, contact the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at 1-800-808-7378 or serve@tc.umn.edu or visit www.umn.edu/~serve. To contact a volunteer peer mentor in service-learning,

contact the National Service-Learning Exchange by calling toll-free 1-877-572-3924, e-mailing lsaexchange@nylc.org or visiting www.lsaexchange.org.

For help with education or literacy programs, call LEARNS, the Corporation's T/TA provider for educational success. LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1-800-361-7890, www.nwrel.org/learns, and the Bank Street College of Education, 1-800-930-5664.

Literacy Projects

(continued from page 11)

Identifying Appropriate Space within a School for Tutoring Sessions

Space is at a premium because schools are frequently overcrowded. Volunteers may initially find they must hunt for a space to work one-to-one with children and to consistently call their own. Not having consistent space for tutoring and volunteer meetings can cause volunteers to feel that the project lacks structure and organization.

Although space for volunteers may have been identified in the original proposal, without a doubt it must be addressed again when actually beginning work in a school. Be polite and respectful when working with school administrators, but be very clear in letting them know that space is essential to working with children and to the success of the project. The space does not need to be fancy, but needs to be set apart in some way, with some sense of privacy so there are not a lot of distractions.

Evaluating and Assessing the Impact of the Project's Work

With any literacy project, it is sometimes difficult to know what to measure, how to measure success and how to communicate the progress of the project. There are many ways to demonstrate the positive impact of your project. Work with your school principal or leader to identify areas of your program that will be evaluated by the school. Communicate what you need to know and mutually decide when this information will be provided to you. If possible, arrange in advance to work with a local evaluator who can provide assistance to your project. This evaluator should be willing and able to have an ongoing relationship with your project. ■