

Here is our agenda for today's webinar:

- Opening Remarks: Bill Basl
- CNCS and Subgrantee Selection: Jill Graham
- Commission Subgrantee Selection: Emily Haber and Jessica Kessler
- Commission Input and Questions
- Closing Remarks

Bill was appointed to lead State and National in 2013. As many of you know, Bill is also:

- Proud VISTA Alumnus
- Former Executive Director of the WA Commission and;
- Founder of the Washington Service Corps and the Veterans Corps

The 2015 Commission Virtual Learning Community is designed to support the leadership of all State Service Commissions. The topics for each webinar will focus on key areas where CNCS and commissions work as grant-making partners.

- February 5, 3:00-4:30 pm Eastern  
Topic: New grantee outreach with Oksana Jensen and Lisa Castaldo and Christine Williams at Serve Alabama
- March 17, 3:00-4:30 pm Eastern  
Topic: Subgrantee selection
- June 15, 3:00-4:30 pm Eastern  
Topic: Board development and executive leadership
- August 25, 3:00-4:30 pm Eastern  
Topic: Subgrantee monitoring

Our next speaker is Jill Graham. Jill was hired as the Special Program and Project Specialist in January. In that role, she is the lead for all State and National GARP processes.

Before taking on this leadership role, Jill worked as a State and National Program Officer here at CNCS and as an AmeriCorps Portfolio Manager YouthBuild USA, one of the largest AmeriCorps national programs in the country.

Jill has also worked as an AmeriCorps Program Director and served as an AmeriCorps member with the Delaware State Parks AmeriCorps Program.

It is my pleasure to provide a brief overview of the subgrant selection process through the CNCS lens.

As you all know, CNCS and State Service Commissions share several very important functions in the AmeriCorps State grant-making world. As AmeriCorps funders, we are tasked with conducting outreach

to potential grant applicants, designing and delivering effective review and selection processes, training our grant recipients, and providing strong oversight of the public funds provided by AmeriCorps.

This graphic demonstrates the inter-connectedness in our work as grant-making partners.

Here is a look at the annual grant-making calendar at CNCS. Please note that this timeline refers only to the main AmeriCorps State and National grant process.

In addition to this large process, there are now several other competitions and processes led by CNCS each year – these may or may not involve commissions. Examples of these recent competitions include: School Turnaround, Justice AmeriCorps, and Operation AmeriCorps.

The State and National grant calendar aligns generally with the federal fiscal year. The initial Notice of Funding Opportunity is released at the start of the fiscal year or as early as humanly possible. Based on the NOFO, the Corporation designs and delivers a number of online materials to support the funding opportunity and solicit strong grant applications.

As you can see on the slide, there are 2 Prime Application submission deadlines for commissions: the Competitive in January and the Formula in June or July.

And I noted in red on the slide that our office is now in the midst of the Grant Application Review Process for the 2015 Competitive grant cycle. This webinar does not address any information on that competition since we are in process.

Here is an excerpt from the Code of Federal Regulations that relates to the role of State Service Commissions in AmeriCorps grant processes.

All commissions have an opportunity to perform these two functions: to prepare an application to receive funding or education awards and to administer a competitive process. As I'm sure you know, those applications are called Prime applications, and they are submitted to CNCS via eGrants. The state or local applications for funding are submitted to CNCS from the commissions under the single Prime application.

The competitive process, as noted in the CFR, is not prescribed. It is left to each state to determine what structure and timeline it will use to apply for the federal AmeriCorps funds. And the way that the processes look from state to state varies tremendously. In just a few minutes, we'll hear from two of our state colleagues on how their commissions tackle this core function of a commission.

Within the broad charge provided in the CFR, commissions have several important and specific tasks related to Prime grant application submission. The tasks fall in to 2 categories: strategic and technical.

On the strategic front, commissions strive to:

- Maximize investment of AmeriCorps resources in state;
- Support state initiatives/priorities; and
- Foster excellent AmeriCorps program implementation and member experiences.

On the technical front, commission staff members have a number of steps to complete in eGrants prior to the CNCS deadline:

- They attach subgrant applications to Prime;
- Complete narratives as instructed in the application instructions; and
- Rank applications, when requested, and provide justification for ranking.

As with all of our work, there is a great deal of variation from state to state about how the subgrant selection process works. We know that:

- Commissions tend to have the best information about local grant applicants – and how they align with CNCS priorities – so they are in the best possible solution to refine subapplications and submit a high quality Prime application.
- That said, we also know that state rules about grant application review vary across our commission network, and restrictions may impact a commission's ability to edit, correct, or improve subgrant submissions.
- Finally, CNCS publishes detailed application guidance and training material to help commissions submit strong subapplications – and it often falls to commissions to interrupt and implement this guidance and training for local or state subgrant applicants.

I've noted several times that CNCS provides a number of resources to support the subgrant outreach and selection processes for state commissions. These resources include:

1. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO),
2. Glossary of Terms,
3. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),
4. Technical Assistance Calls, and
5. Training Materials on Performance Measurement, Evaluation, etc.

These materials are updated each year.

You can find all those resources at the Available Funding link on the CNCS website: [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)

This is a screenshot of the 2015 Competitive funding announcement. Here you can see the list of resources and supporting materials developed to help commissions, national programs, and tribes submit strong grant applications.

And there are many additional resources on the National Service Knowledge Network that support critical elements of AmeriCorps programming, including performance measurement and program evaluation.

This is a screenshot of the CNCS performance measurement page on the Knowledge Network that shows links to extremely helpful training content. These materials are posted for all potential applicants, and the hope is that commissions will be able to tailor them to the state's particular needs and interests.

With that, I want to pause for a few minutes and see what questions you have related to CNCS and the subgrant selection timeline and process.

Introduce Emily: it is my pleasure to introduce our next speaker: Emily Haber, the CEO of the Massachusetts service commissions. Emily:

- Has been the CEO since 2008;
- She has worked with Boston Main Streets in the City of Boston and;
- Emily serves on the boards of America's Service Commissions and the Massachusetts Nonprofit Alliance.

Established in 1991, MSA is a private, nonprofit organization that serves as the state commission on community service and volunteerism. Its mission is to catalyze the innovation and growth of service and volunteerism by creating partnerships that maximize resources, expertise, capacity, and impact.

In support of our mission, MSA invests public and private funds in institutions and organizations; convenes and mobilizes individuals, nonprofits, corporations, and government entities to link strategies related to service and volunteerism; builds capacity of programs and agencies through training and technical assistance; and advocates for the development and promotion of public policies and private initiatives that incorporate service and volunteerism as effective strategies to address community needs.

MSA is supporting 23 AmeriCorps programs with close to 1,200 members.

We have 35 Commonwealth Corps members serving at 15 host site organizations.

Through our Volunteer Generation Fund, we supported National Days of Service projects for 9/11, MLK Day, and National Volunteer Week and capacity building for nonprofits in volunteer management through trainings and the implementation of the Service Enterprise Initiative.

We will host our bi-annual statewide conference on service and volunteering on June 1.

MSA funding priorities:

- Geographic and programmatic diversity
- Effective solutions that meet community needs
- Meaningful member service experiences
- Volunteer generation
- Demonstrable impact
- Early Childhood Literacy

MSA timeline

MSA has a staff of 11.5 FTE including a Director of Programs and Innovation, a Program Team consisting of a Senior Program Officer and 3 Program Officers for AmeriCorps and a Commonwealth Corps Program Manager and Program Associate

The AmeriCorps Program Team provides support to the current portfolio of 23 AmeriCorps programs through one-on-one consultations, quarterly Program Director meetings, and AmeriCorps Kick-off Orientation meeting in August

They work closely with the applicants selected to submit full proposals, providing feedback on several drafts and working with them on performance measures

MSA can provide a lot of guidance and feedback to applicants while they are working on their full proposals, but the applicant really has to own the program design – make sure they are not putting content in their proposals to “appease” us but that they don’t really have the capacity or commitment to implement if funded.

Support expansions when appropriate – it is easier to achieve overall growth by supporting the expansion of successful programs than by supporting the start-up of a new program.

New programs are exciting though, so as you travel around your state keep your eyes and ears open for potential new programs to introduce to AmeriCorps – it could take a few years to get an organization ready for AmeriCorps and the first step is understanding the opportunity.

Our next guest speaker is Jessica Kessler from Serve Wisconsin. Jessica:

- Has worked at the Wisconsin commission since 2012;
- Worked with a number of VISTAs around Wisconsin in her work with the American Medical Association Foundation; and
- Jessica is a newlywed!

Serve Wisconsin is an Independent Agency attached to Wisconsin Department of Administration

- Governor-appointed Board of 21 Commissioners
- Staff of 5
  - 4 Program Officers and 1 Executive Director
  - Each PO has a portfolio of 6 or 7 AmeriCorps State programs + Volunteer Generation Fund
- All staff are classified State employees
- Executive Director reports directly to Board
- Limited Outreach necessary to get applicants.
- - Upon release of NOFO:
  - Send ~2,500 postcards notifying release of State RFP
  - Post notice in Sunday WI State Journal for 2 or 3 weeks
  - WI State Request for Proposals is reviewed by Department of Administration.

- - Board approves changes recommended by the Program Evaluation & Development Committee
- Serve Wisconsin Program Officer serves as RFP Manager.

#### Subgrantee Outreach

#### Technical Assistance:

- RFP, Instructions, and other materials posted on website all year for reference – complete transparency
- Staff consults with potential applicants until RFP released
- Three types of Technical Assistance webinars provided:
  - New, Continuation, and Recompete/Experienced Applicants
- In 2015 – 2016, provided grant-writing webinars presented by Amy Salinas
- Staff accepts questions until 3 or 4 days before due date
  - All questions submitted in writing

#### Serve Wisconsin timeline

- Peer Reviewers receive training and assistance prior to review.
  - They utilize a scoring form that uses NOFO/RFP language (largely taken from ServeMinnesota).
  - Serve WI staff uses a similar form for their reviews.
  - All applicants receive two levels of feedback and are able to use it to improve their applications.

All applicants that are not funded competitively are considered for State Formula funding

- Formula funding is for 1 year
- Formula applicants must recompetete in following year

Going through Competitive process gives Formula applicants multiple levels of feedback: State peer and staff & CNCS peer and staff

If Formula allocation is larger than requests, Board may release a Formula Funding RFP

Gives opportunity to fund programs addressing State priorities

- 2014 – 2015 Program Year prioritized Capacity Building
- Considering Education & Rural Program Focus for 2015 – 2016

#### Lessons Learned/Recommendations

- Closely duplicating CNCS process helps applicants
- Performance as funding consideration makes performance a priority for programs
- Applicants appreciate appropriate Technical Assistance
- Very condensed timeline, but try to give applicants as much time as you can

- Continuously educate Board on the process
- Subcommittee makes recommendations to Board – keeps staff out of decisions and makes process more efficient
- Clear and succinct State Service Plan makes it easier to align with programs

Find CNCS resources at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)

- Grant application support materials
- National Service Knowledge Network resources

Learn more about the Massachusetts Service Alliance at [www.mass-service.org](http://www.mass-service.org) and Serve Wisconsin at [www.servewisconsin.wi.gov](http://www.servewisconsin.wi.gov)

Next Commission Webinar: June 15, 3:00 – 4:30 pm Eastern; Board and Leadership Development