



TANF Rural Initiative



Rural Communities Initiative Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/AmeriCorps Teleconference Tuesday, November 18th, 2008 at 2:00 pm EST

James Butler, FPO:

Good afternoon everyone, and hello. First of all, I would like to welcome everyone to this Rural Communities Initiative TANF/AmeriCorps Teleconference. As an outcome of the Rural Communities Academy that occurred in September, many who participated expressed some interest in learning more about how to utilize AmeriCorps volunteers in their program, as well as in their community. So, we are pretty pleased today that we have been able to put together this teleconference in hopes that some of the information shared will be helpful and useful as you operate your program. Today, we have five very knowledgeable people from four programs who will share their experiences and expertise with us pertaining to AmeriCorps. After our speakers have presented, we will open the lines up for any questions or comments you might have for our speakers.

Without further adieu, our first speaker for today is Ms. Charndrea Leonard. She is the AmeriCorps state and national program officer in Dallas, Texas. Charndrea has worked as the Program Officer for AmeriCorps State and National at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) for four years. She joined CNCS in 2003 as an AmeriCorps Recruitment Program Specialist. Prior to her work at CNCS, she spent four years working in the nonprofit arena in various capacities. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia with a BA in Journalism and a Masters in Public Administration. She is also a proud AmeriCorps alum. So, welcome Charndrea.

Charndrea:

Thank you, and hello to everyone on the call. I am a Program Officer working with AmeriCorps National with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). I thought it would be best if I just gave you a brief overview of AmeriCorps and the corporation, and then discussed a little about how you could apply to become an AmeriCorps grantee if that is something you are interested in doing in order to serve your community.

So, the first thing I would like to do is talk a little about CNCS. Just so you know who we are, we are an independent federal grant making agency. Even though we have corporation in our title, we are a federal agency. And we were created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and our nation. The mission of our agency is to support people and organizations in using citizen service as a strategy to meet critical national and community needs, and to foster an ethic of civic responsibility. Since our inception, we have engaged more than 1.5 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds through our three main programs which are: AmeriCorps, SeniorCorps, and Learn and Serve America. I am going to talk about AmeriCorps in general now.

AmeriCorps is a network of local, state, and national service programs that connect more than 75,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet our country's critical needs in education, public safety, health, environmental needs, and in other areas such as disaster response and



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preparedness. AmeriCorps provides opportunities for individuals to serve as AmeriCorps members to serve their communities across the nation. Since 1994, when AmeriCorps was created, more than 500,000 men and women have provided service as members in the community.

AmeriCorps programs are designed by the applicant organization to address specific community needs through the assistance of full time or part time AmeriCorps members. The AmeriCorps grant includes an allotment of AmeriCorps member positions, and the funds that you would receive from AmeriCorps are directly tied to the specific number of AmeriCorps members, and are solely for the program expenses. The grants, again, partially cover the expense of operating an AmeriCorps program, and they do not cover general organizational expenses.

So, what exactly are AmeriCorps members, or who are they? They are individuals who are enrolled for a specific term of service with an approved AmeriCorps program. Their term of service is between 300 hours and 1,700 hours each year. 300 would be the minimum amount of time someone could serve as an AmeriCorps member in a year's time, and 1,700 hours would be the full time member who serves for a one year period of time. Members can serve for one or two years in AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps members receive an education award of up to \$4,725 for successfully completing a full time term of service. Education awards are prorated for lesser terms of service, and that education award that they receive is a benefit for their service in AmeriCorps and they can use that to either pay back student loans that they accrued when they were students, if they already went to school, or – if they have not gone to school – they can use those funds to help pay for college tuition. Some AmeriCorps members also receive a living allowance, health insurance, and child care benefits to support them during their terms of service. Those things are required for someone who is a full time member, and then the living allowance can be paid for someone who is a less than full time member, but it is not required that they receive that – as a benefit during their service. AmeriCorps members must be individuals who are U.S. citizens, U.S. national, or lawful, permanent resident alien of the U.S. They must be at least 17 years of age at the beginning of their term of service.

Those are members – I am going to talk now about AmeriCorps grants and what they do. What AmeriCorps grants do is provide funding to support some of the expenses related to running an AmeriCorps program. Grant recipients must contribute matched funding to support the program, and that match can be cash, or it can be in-kind, or a combination of those. Organizations that receive our grants are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and supervising AmeriCorps members that serve in their programs.

In general, the purpose and benefits of AmeriCorps grants are to fund high quality programs that help meet community needs through service, develop an ethic of service in AmeriCorps members, strengthen the capacity of the community to address their needs, and demonstrate the impact they are having in the community. AmeriCorps programs are developed by the grantees that have identified a compelling need and designed a set of activities for members and community volunteers, that will have a direct impact on that need. The grantee receives funds to support the administration of the program. They also receive access to training and technical assistance resources provided by the Corporation, and entrance into a network of organizations



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across the county who are improving their communities in different ways. If you become an AmeriCorps grantee, you not only get guidance from program officers and grant officers who are here on our staff at CNCS, but you also have access to our training and technical assistance providers that are a wealth of knowledge and resources in a lot of different areas, whether it be sustainability and fund raising, or member recruitment, program management; we provide coaching assistance through our technical assistance – we have a lot of resources in place that will help you be successful if this is something you want to become as an AmeriCorps program.

Within the network of AmeriCorps programs, we also make sure that you are connected with other programs that are maybe operating in similar conditions you may be operating in, or serve the same type of member, or there are different kinds of categories that we call affinity groups, where we group programs together so they can share their knowledge and resources with one another. There is a lot of support. Peer to peer and from the Corporation – resources that we provide as the grantor to our organizations.

What the community gets as a benefit is a dedicated team of individuals who are committed to addressing the needs of the community through AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps members themselves gain skills and experience, as well as an education award that they can use to further their education and pay student loans. So, that is kind of a brief overview of what AmeriCorps is and what an AmeriCorps member is. Now I would like to talk a little about how you can become part of AmeriCorps.

There are a couple of different ways. At the Corporation, our department is called AmeriCorps State and National, and we are divided into state program officers and national program officers. If you work with AmeriCorps state, what that means is that they work with state service commissions. Almost every state has a state service commission – I believe South Dakota is the only state that currently does not have one, but they still receive funding from us as an AmeriCorps state. The state service commissions are the organizations in each state that are responsible for growing AmeriCorps in their state, and they hold a grant competition to fund new AmeriCorps programs in their state. So, if you are operating in a single state – like I am here in Texas, so there is Texas One Star Foundation, which is an organization in this state that serves as the grantor organization for AmeriCorps programs in the state of Texas. So, they fund a lot of different types of programs, most related to education, but there are other programs and other commissions across the country have other focus areas. If you were interested in becoming an AmeriCorps program and only operating in the state where you are currently located, you would need to contact your state service commission to find out about what their application process is, what their funding priorities are for their state, and any other information they would need to provide you, like the application and other things that they could offer to assist you as you apply for AmeriCorps funding.

If you are able to operate in more than one state, then a possibility is that you might be able to apply directly to the Corporation as part of our AmeriCorps National competition. At AmeriCorps National, we have six different grant competitions, one just closed and it was for planning grants; what those would do is offer an organization up to \$50,000 to be used to help



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plan an AmeriCorps program. They would have that for a one year period of time where they would get some support from us, they would be assigned a program officer, get entrance to our network of programs. We would work with them to help them plan out an AmeriCorps program, so that in the 2010 competition, they would be able to submit a full grant for a program that would operate in two or more states. That is why we are called National, because of our programs in the national portfolio. Most operate at least in two states, many operate in more, though. Some on a regional and some on a national level.

The other national grant programs (besides the planning grants), would be national direct, professional core, education award programs, and then we have two different competitions for Indian tribes – one is the Indian tribe program grant, and one is the Indian tribe planning grant. The planning grant, again, that competition already ended.

For applying to AmeriCorps, the deadline to apply directly to the Corporation for national grant would be January 13, 2009 at 5:00pm EST. You can apply in e-Grants, which is an online application system where you go in and type in your narrative in various text fields and then fill out your budget in a predetermined format that is online.

For our staff at AmeriCorps national, we host a series of calls to provide more information for applicants. There's an orientation to AmeriCorps where I go over the information that I covered briefly with you right now, we go over that in more detail and provide even more information about terminology, and we go into detail about other grant competitions, and answer questions for organizations that are not familiar with AmeriCorps. After that call, the next call is what we call the 'Next Step'. That is an intermediate level call where we go over in a bit more detail program models, we help people think through their ideas, we answer questions, and we go over the application selection criteria, so that people have a better idea about what we are requesting in our applications and how they might best answer some of the criteria – to demonstrate in their application that they have what it takes to actually administer an AmeriCorps program.

We also have a budget call, which is facilitated by one of our training and technical assistance providers, who answers questions from applicants about what is and is not allowable to include in the AmeriCorps budget, how to calculate this or that, what are administrative or administrative direct cost rates, what's appropriate travel – just take you through all you need to know about how to create the budget to support the program you are designing.

Then we also have calls that help people navigate through e-grants so they know what to expect when they go in there. It shows them the screenshots of different narrative boxes, and takes you through e-grants so you are not confused when it is time for you to actually go in there and submit your application yourself.

Those are the things we do to help people if they have questions and want to apply to AmeriCorps. I also want to give you our AmeriCorps national telephone number and email so that if you have questions (I have to leave before this call is over), but if you have questions you



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would like to ask, you can either call at 202-606-7508 or email us at AmeriCorpsNational@cns.gov. Those are two ways you can contact us after this call is over.

I will close with going over the roles and responsibilities and requirements of an AmeriCorps grantee, and then I will move on and let the next person take over.

If you are going to be an AmeriCorps grantee, that means you have the overall legal, administrative, and fiscal responsibility for the entire scope of the program you are designing. As a grantee, you must provide the financial management and programmatic oversight for the program. You must monitor the financial management and program performance, even if you have members working at operating sites or service sites that are not right where you are, so you know what is happening and will provide training and technical assistance to the staff. You must ensure the recruitment and retention of members. You must also train those members and prepare them for service. If you are a grantee of the Corporation (a direct grantee), you would act as a liaison between the Corporation and your sites, and you would provide systems that allow for member hours and activities to be tracked, and which collect data on activities that is used to both measure and track the progress and to strengthen your program.

I just want to leave you with that, so you can have an idea about what some of the responsibilities are for being an AmeriCorps program. I hope you found this information useful. I would be happy to answer questions at a later date if I am not able to be on the call again when we get to the question and answer period.

James Butler, FPO:

Thank you so much Charndrea for your presentation. In case you are not on at the end of the call, I want to thank you now. Our next speaker will be Ms. Anna Wright Huff. Ms. Huff is employed by the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences College of Public Health, as a community liaison to the Dean of Public Health. Her work involves the implementation of community-based risk reduction, and health promotion activities across the Delta of Arkansas. She's also the Director of the Mid-Delta Community Consortium, where she manages funds of over a half million dollars, that she administers and distributes across 19 Delta counties in Arkansas to assist in meeting unmet health needs through the provision and coordination of technical assistance to ensure sustainability in these communities. A graduate of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, she is a native of the Delta, and also a graduate of LeadAR (Arkansas' state leadership program). Her work has taken her across the U.S. and abroad, studying at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel, and the University of California, Davis in Davis, CA learning new techniques, skills, and sharing lessons learned with others in the field. She is very much involved in community activities and currently serves on the Board of the Arkansas Coalition of Excellence, Arkansas Kids Count Coalition, Arkansas Public Policy Panel, Delta Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Advisory Council, and many other community partnerships. She is a co-instructor at the COPH and a community researcher. Everyone welcome Ms. Huff.



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Anna Wright Huff:

Good afternoon. Thank you so much for that introduction. I was not expecting you to say that much, but thank you anyway. I am the Director of a local nonprofit organization, Mid-Delta Community Consortium, and that is the organization that we serve as a sponsoring organization for the AmeriCorps project. We have an AmeriCorps grant, and have been the recipients of an AmeriCorps grant since 2004. We operate a program that we are very much trying to address the lack of uninsured and underinsured residents across the geographical area in which we work, which is 19 Delta counties, to access prescription medication. We currently – and I am going to talk about our current project – have 15 AmeriCorps members in place, and those members are located across scattered sites. Charndrea mentioned to you, your responsibilities as an AmeriCorps member, as an AmeriCorps project – she mentioned the grantee and I believe she talked about the whole site. There are a lot of responsibilities when you decide to administer such a program. We are very much engaged with our community, as was stated earlier during this introduction. We also engage them in assisting MDCC (which I will use as an acronym for Mid-Delta Community Consortium). We ask them to assist us in meeting the match requirement, because we do not have those resources. We go to them and say to them, if you are interested in hosting (which is what we call the placement of AmeriCorps members at respective sites), an AmeriCorps member, they will be required to provide a certain amount of match.

I am not going to get into a lot of detail about our project, but I do want you to know that our AmeriCorps members are placed at host sites, and they are recruited from the local community; and when I say that, for instance, if an AmeriCorps member is being placed in a respective county, we give that organization who is the host site, the opportunity to recruit that person locally. We also use the Web based recruiting mechanism that the Corporation has in place, but we give the community an option to also locate someone. We feel that that is the best way for that person to be successful, because of the trust factor that a lot of times is needed in the programs that we operate and AmeriCorps members participate in – especially our prescription assistance program.

Our prescription assistance program is one in which we work with uninsured and underinsured individuals, in obtaining prescription medication. We cannot provide those medications, so we have to form strong relationships with our local physicians and hospitals. We do not provide those meds, they come from pharmaceutical companies. I am sure a lot of you have heard of prescription assistance programs – we are one of those many programs. We make sure that our local folks who enroll in our program also are a part of a follow up process that we have instituted. We have instituted that process also by using AmeriCorps members, so we have AmeriCorps members that serve as prescription assistance health advocates, and also AmeriCorps members that serve as community health advocates. And those community health advocates, who we call “CHA”, assist us with the follow up we provide those who enroll in our prescription assistance program.

Not only do we want to see those folks access their medication, we want to make sure that they adhere to taking those medications, so that is where the CHAs come in. Charndrea also



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mentioned the training requirements – we have developed a stream of training for our AmeriCorps members. The state provides training, but we also created a module for our training that is specific to our AmeriCorps program. The state offers an entry level training, and also advanced training. So, our AmeriCorps members all get together for those respective trainings, with other AmeriCorps members across the state. There are approximately 10 AmeriCorps programs in the state of Arkansas. We are the only health focused AmeriCorps project.

Those AmeriCorps members have the opportunity to network with other AmeriCorps members across the state when they attend those state sponsored AmeriCorps meetings. We hold our local AmeriCorps meetings across our region, so that the members can get together and share with each other on a quarterly basis. So, that is one of the responsibilities that we took on as a sponsoring organization. We also took on making sure all of our AmeriCorps members get some training that is consistent across the program, which is civic engagement, things of that sort.

I serve as project director, and then we have a project assistant which is part time (I am part time as well). We have a clerical person who is part time, but none of these folks are paid through AmeriCorps funds. We have in-kind resources paid for those particular staff members. The resources that we receive are strictly for the AmeriCorps members' living allowance and their health insurance. We have a team leader, who is an AmeriCorps member with additional responsibilities. Our team leader serves as a mentor to oncoming or new AmeriCorps members.

We found that this was essential because they are so scattered – they need some type of mechanism whereby they can have someone serve as a support, other than their host site. Their host site is a support, but a lot of times they do not know as much about the ins and outs of the AmeriCorps program, as the AmeriCorps staff or AmeriCorps members. So it is critical that there is some type of mechanism in place where these folks can stay in contact with each other. That is really an issue when you have rural programs. Some of our members are as much as 100 miles apart. Therefore, we need to make sure we have a mechanism for communication, support, feedback...it is a lot of work. Being an AmeriCorps sponsor – I do not want anyone to say it is not a lot of work.

It is a wonderful program; we have, over the last year, been able to save the local residents who are part of our prescription assistance program over \$700,000. The first year that we implemented this program, in the first 10 months, we saved folks across the state close to \$3 million (not only in our service areas – we can serve anybody in the United States). So this is a fantastic mechanism to promote and enhance the prescription assistance program.

We have also been very engaged in forming partnerships, because without those partnerships, this program would not operate. As I mentioned earlier, the hospitals, the local physicians, all of those orgs and agencies are very active partners in what we do. We could not do it without them, because we do not have the staff, nor do we have the resources. There is a lot I could tell you about our program, but I would rather entertain questions. I want to know what it is you want to know.



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I am also thinking, one more thing I would like to tell you before I leave, is that we also build a piece into our project that our AmeriCorps members are responsible for recruiting volunteers. And those volunteers are in place to assist those AmeriCorps members in operating their program, and to learn their program so that once those members are off the scene, there will be some sustainability and continuity in that program's continued operation.

Several of our AmeriCorps members have also, upon completing their terms of service, they have been absorbed by their host sites. We have two hospitals that have employed their former AmeriCorps members. We have a local community organization that has employed their former AmeriCorps member. So these are avenues whereby these folks are now fully employed by the organization where they were once placed as AmeriCorps members. And we wrote all of that into our sustainability plan. This was something we had planned – we did not know if it would happen, but it did, and we were very fortunate and very happy that it did, because this is a way where folks who receive this wonderful training; you do not want to lose those folks once they are trained, especially in their respective communities. So therefore, those folks have been maintained and they are now operating their prescription assistance program.

Now I am going to stop at this point, and not inundate you with a lot of information, and wait until we get to the question and answer period.

James Butler, FPO:

Okay, thank you very much, Ms. Huff. Our next speaker will be Ms. Valeria Pennington, who is the Director of Lower Mississippi Delta Service Corps. Ms. Pennington began work at the Lower Mississippi Delta Service Corps in September of 1996. She became Executive Director in February 2006. In her role as director she assists Arkansas and Mississippi Delta Service Corps develop projects and strengthen communities. She is a native of Rosedale, Mississippi and is a graduate of Delta State University where she earned her B.B.A. and M.B.A. degree and is currently enrolled in the Ed.D program. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome Ms. Pennington.

Valeria Pennington:

Good afternoon. I think that my role in the call is a bit different from everyone else's. Mr. Butler just told you about my work with Lower Mississippi Delta Service Corps, and Lower Mississippi Delta Service Corps is a national direct AmeriCorps program, as you heard the term earlier. We are operating currently in the states of Mississippi and Arkansas. We have 45 members in the Delta counties, serving in those states. In 2004, the past Executive Director decided we needed a volunteer center in our area, as a way of connecting nonprofit agencies with volunteers who are underserved and wanted to go do something to give back to the community. So the volunteer center was formed. Part of what the volunteer center does, is that we have a partnership with human services here in our county, where we work with their TANF recipients.

TANF recipients there come to our office for placement, they complete an application, we find out what their interest areas are, what their educational level is, and we try to find a placement for them based on those things. Most of the people who come to us are without a high school



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diploma, but they want to do something to improve their situation. So our nonprofit partners work with us in placing them; for instance, some of them are interested in becoming teachers, and we will place them in head start programs or schools, to have them get a feel for what it is they'll be preparing themselves for. Because we are associated with the AmeriCorps program, we push for them to apply to our program, and also in doing that, we give them an opportunity to see that there are career possibilities for them. Part of the training they receive when they come to our office, we have professional development training for them – resume writing, interview skills, core ability skill training, conflict resolution, and communication. As I mentioned earlier, some of the people who come in don't have high school diplomas. So one of the things we do is try to get them connected with other agencies that provide GED programs for them free of charge.

The people come to us and serve 20-30 hours per week up to six months before the department of human services pulls them and puts them into a job readiness class, but they can come back into our program. We have had several of the individuals who were receiving TANF to switch from TANF to enter the AmeriCorps program. Like one of the presenters said earlier, once they enter our program, they receive an educational award, which will assist them in receiving the education they need in order to get the career they desire. When I spoke with Ms. Barr earlier, I was telling them about the things we do here. We have heard earlier what the AmeriCorps program does, but the TANF recipients who are coming in through the volunteer center to do those hours, do go on to find a career path they like. That is basically my connection with AmeriCorps and with TANF. So I am here to answer questions now or at the end.

James Butler, FPO:

Okay, thank you very much Ms. Pennington. Moving right along, our last and final speaker will be two people – Ms. Kristal J. Wilson and Ms. Amanda Gorley – from the Kitsap Community Resources AmeriCorps program.

Ms. Kristal Wilson is the Community Jobs Coordinator for Kitsap Community Resources, which is a nonprofit agency that provides hope and opportunity for low-income Kitsap County, Washington residents with resources that promote self-sufficiency. Her staff consists of one current AmeriCorps member and two full time staff members that have been in AmeriCorps. One staff member completed one year of AmeriCorps in another county and the other staff member was the most recent hire who has completed two years of AmeriCorps at KCR. Her other two staff members were both on TANF before becoming full time hires.

Ms. Amanda Gorley is the Supported Community Works Program Coordinator at Kitsap Community Resources (KCR). She works directly with TANF participants who are either waiting for school, or working part time and still on TANF, as well as those who are not sure of what they want to do or what they can do. She came to KCR as a TANF participant in 2001. The only work experience she had had was in fast food restaurants. She was placed into the Community Job Corps Program as an office assistant at KCR in 2002. She was selected for AmeriCorps in 2004 and again in 2005 (while still on TANF). She was hired by KCR in 2006, and within a year's time, was promoted to the program coordinator position. She currently has



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one staff member who was also hired from a TANF program and an AmeriCorps member on staff who is currently on TANF.

Kristal Wilson and Amanda Gorley:

Thank you. I believe our part in this, we do not work directly with the AmeriCorps program itself – KCR does have their own AmeriCorps program that we operate in Kitsap County. We were asked to talk about how we work with Kitsap County residents on TANF, and how we also work with AmeriCorps members as well.

Our AmeriCorps program is the largest in the state; we currently have 36 members. Our members serve as tutors in our local schools, work with our local Head Start program as family advocates, are placed with the Red Cross, are placed inside KCR as case managers and facilitators; we have members with the YMCA, we have a member who is a family legal advocate. We have a program called Kitsap Youth in Action, which helps gets our youth interested in volunteering, and they go around and do projects within the county. We have members placed in that and they work directly with the youth. We also have a program that works directly with our courts, and we have members who help provide some of the community service that the courts do, which is a huge savings to our county. We have members of our Kitsap County Health District, and we also have members serving with the Children's Health Center – a program that goes into the schools and helps prepare meals that are sent overseas.

Kristal and I work in two separate programs that are with the Community Trade and Economic Development and we provide services to our TANF families. We also select TANF recipients to serve. By having them work with us, we get to learn a lot about them. Having the AmeriCorps program housed inside KCR itself, we are able to see many of the people we serve discuss and get excited about the opportunities to volunteer and give back to the community. I, myself, that was why I joined AmeriCorps. KCR did so much for me and my children to help me that I wanted to give back to my community, because my community gave to me. So we are seeing that consistently, that is why so many people want to join AmeriCorps. The programs that Kristal and I run provide employment opportunities. I will let her speak directly about hers. The programs we operate help some of the hardest people to serve – at least some of our TANF recipients that we have are not quite ready for employment activities. On the other side of the coin, they are ready, but their activities may not be ready for them. So in order to meet Federal participation regulations, we have them in a work activity.

The goal of my program is to help them either find out what their career goal is and move them forward, or just keep them in work activities to help give them career goals or activity while they are waiting for their career to start. I currently have an AmeriCorps who just started (first year), who was a Community Job participant (which is the program that Kristal is going to be talking about), and she was placed as a receptionist. She is currently on TANF and is serving in AmeriCorps and she is doing wonderful. Having come from that side, as a TANF recipient, we are able to reach the clients on a different level than some people are able to, because we have been there, we have had the experience, and I believe we are able to offer some kind of hope that, okay – if they did it, they are not much different than we are, so we can do it too. We also have the ability, since we partner with the Department of Social and Health Services, we can give



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them a different side of the coin too. As far as I know as a TANF recipient, you do not always feel that the people you are working with are on your side. We are able to help them see how the other agencies that they are working with are on their side, and how they are advocating for them, and how they fight for them, even if they are not able to see it. On that note, I am going to let Krystal talk to you about Community Jobs.

Krystal Wilson:

Thanks Amanda. My job as a Community Job Corps leader is to bring TANF participants into our program. Our program is kind of a middle program – in Amanda's program, they might not quite be ready to go out and get unsubsidized employment. The goal of Community Jobs is for them to exit out of our program with unsubsidized employment. We have, with the exception of myself, I have two current staff members that were in AmeriCorps, and one current staff who is in AmeriCorps, and like Amanda said, they come through us. So we get to see how they work, how they establish themselves, do they have what it takes. Even though we are not supposed to encourage them to apply for AmeriCorps, because it could potentially be a conflict of interest for us, we do get an awful lot of people who apply that come from the Community Jobs program. Quite a few of them are selected, and they do fabulous. They do absolutely wonderful things at the host sites where they are placed. A lot of times, we do directly hire them if positions become available. So we have intense case management going on in the program I have. Our participants are not quite ready for job search – maybe they need some updated work skills, updated resume, maybe they are changing career fields and need work experience in that avenue. We give them the opportunity to participate in the program and hopefully it will lead to unsubsidized employment. So I guess I am wondering if anyone has questions. I think we are a model program, that we not only work with TANF participants, but we work with AmeriCorps and a lot of our AmeriCorps members did come from the TANF program.

James Butler, FPO:

Okay. Thank you very much Amanda and Kristal. We are looking good for timing, and I just wanted to check and make certain whether or not any of these speakers would like to make additional comments before we open the call for questions and comments.

No? Okay. Stephanie, we are ready for questions.

Stephanie Barr:

Okay. Should we give everyone a minute to digest information, and then open up the lines?

James:

Yes.

Operator:

Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to register for questions, please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. You will hear a three tone prompt to acknowledge your request. If your question has been answered and you would like to withdraw your registration, please press the 1 followed by the 3. I'd like to remind you, if you would like to register for questions, please press the 1 followed by the 4.



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We have a question to start –

Participant 1:

I guess I have a question for all the speakers. Would you give some examples of some of the soft skills trainings and any recommended programs you have used at your site for the soft skills and job readiness programs, and also elaborate more on the job identification and the career pathways for the low skilled workers that were mentioned several times.

Valerie Pennington:

For the TANF recipients that come into our office, we have an application that they complete. One the application, we ask them about their interest areas and whether or not they'd be interested in doing work or volunteer in an office setting, if they would like to go into schools, and if so, in what capacity. Some write down teacher's assistants, and we prepare them, then, with the teachers. They actually go into the classroom and the teachers kind of show them what it is they have to do in their day to day duties as teachers. They get a chance to work with the teachers and then, after that, they will come back to us (we have a Vista member here in the office), and the Vista member would do an assessment with them to see what trainings they would need. After that, there is a job readiness training, but that training is provided by the Department of Human Services. In that job readiness training, they get the employability skills, do resume writing, and if they have their high school diploma, they complete the college applications. Or if they are not ready for college at that point because of financial reasons, we introduce them to the AmeriCorps program and give them that as an option to get in extra trainings and getting the educational award at the end of their service.

Did that answer your question?

Participant 1:

Yeah. Are there any other answers? I know there are several sites who are interested in soft skills, work readiness, and job identification and career pathways. So we were really looking for what are your insights and recommendations and if there are any specific programs you are utilizing, that other sites throughout the country or potential grantees could use to implement their soft skills and job readiness programs.

Anna Huff:

We do not take on that task per say, the Department of Volunteerism through the Department of Human Services is the entity who facilitates all of the soft skills training for us. We do something in-house, but we do not have any particular program we use. We have created something on our own, based on my experiences and based on our work with the AmeriCorps members through the years. But our formal training comes through the department of volunteerism. So I could get you additional information.

Participant 1:

That would be wonderful. Anything you can get us would be great.



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Anna Huff:

Will we get a list of the folks who are on and their contact information (*Stephanie: yes*)? Okay.

Amanda Gorley:

For our AmeriCorps members, each year we have a development training. Typically what that consists of is something similar to the dependable strengths program. We have kind of modified that a little bit, and what we call it is a Discovery Process. What the members go through is a program where they can identify their strengths and participants can hopefully use that to sell themselves.

For our TANF recipients, we have what we call Life Skills classes, and we also have an HAST program, which is enhanced job skills training. In the life skills class, we use for the first ten days that a participant is referred to us. What that consists of is anger management, stress management, time management, conflict resolution, dealing with difficult people, just typical things that we feel they would need actually. We are currently updating that and modifying the program to better suit our participants. We actually use our feedback to modify our program. If they say, this is not working for us, then we will ask what they would like to see, what would work better and then implement that.

Enhanced job skills training is a classroom setting, and they do some computer tutorials with Microsoft Office Suites; they have people come and talk to them about domestic violence; they have had outside employers come in and talk about what it is employers are seeking (skills); maybe how to better present themselves at a job interview – sometimes what a participant feels is appropriate to wear to an interview or pick up an application is not necessarily really appropriate, so hearing from an outside employer versus us saying the same thing, they are more apt to listen to the employer because this is the person who could potentially be offering them a job.

The enhanced job skill training is a 24 week program, and the participants are usually there for three hours a day, four days a week. We are flexible as well, depending on their schedule. It is a program we have that is meant for someone who maybe is not ready to go into the college system, or is not seeking their GED, or maybe does not need to have anymore updating to their college education. That is what we offer.

Participant 1:

Thank you.

Stephanie:

Operator, could you please repeat for everyone, how to submit a question?

Operator:

Yeah. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to register for questions, please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. You will hear a three tone prompt to acknowledge your



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request. If your question has been answered and you would like to withdraw your registration, please press the 1 followed by the 3.

We have no more questions from the phone lines at this time.

Sorry – yes, we do have a question. It is from the line of Luz Pardini from California. Please proceed with your question.

Luz Pardini:

Okay, my question has to do with how would we go about, if we were to send some of our TANF participants to your agency, what is the process for doing a contract, or having all these AmeriCorps agencies as part of our inventory? Would we have the AmeriCorps national and then they would subcontract or send it out to the participants? How would we, what is the process?

Amanda Gorley:

For us, typically all our programs for TANF recipients need to be directly referred to us by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). We do have a few other programs where anyone, including TANF recipients, can just walk in off the streets and apply for the Workforce Investment Act, it is an employment program that they can get enrolled in without a referral. We also have a driver licensing program which helps anyone whose license is suspended for failure to pay a traffic ticket get a payment plan set up and get their license back. We are a local community action agency – we have many, many programs that are not necessarily related to TANF.

Luz Pardini:

If we were to refer participants to your agency, then we would need to contract out? I am not sure how we would go about that.

Amanda Gorley:

We have a contract already, we have a contract in place to provide services to TANF recipients. Our referrals come from DSHS for WorkFirst. The program that Kristal and I oversee are WorkFirst programs, and that's how TANF gets involved.

Luz Pardini:

Okay. I guess I would just need to find out how to make it part of our inventory, so that our system can allow us to do referrals as well. And to find out where there is actually a need to send people.

Anna Huff:

With our program, persons who are interested in applying can either go to the Corporation's Web site and submit an application, or they can go to the DWS office; we accept referrals from DWS. We accept referrals from the Department of Human Services. We also have a recruiting system we use whereby, we are a local nonprofit, so we partner with a lot of other organizations locally and therefore, when we have openings, we alert those particular organizations or



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partners and let them know we are recruiting, and they can send referrals to us. That is here in the Delta of Arkansas. But we have had applicants from all over the country.

Valerie Pennington:

In the Mississippi Delta, what goes on with us is we have a partnership with the Department of Human Services and they give us a list of names and then we have our own partnership with the different nonprofit agencies. We have a Vista member also, and she has different recruitment dates set up during the year where we go out and recruit volunteers as well as nonprofit sites. That is how we get ours.

Participant 2:

I have a question as far as how long did the process take for all of you to become an AmeriCorps grantee, and how difficult is this process? Is it very time consuming?

Anna Huff:

It was probably a yearlong process. It may have been longer if I had not had experience working with an AmeriCorps program (especially a scattered site program) prior to coming to this position. Also, those relationships and partnerships that we previously had were very instrumental in setting up our program the way it has been set up. We receive technical assistance from the state office.

Initially, when we applied, we were not applying through e-grants, so e-grants in itself brought about some new learning that we had to undertake. E-grants can be a challenge for some who may not be as proficient in technology as others are. As far as overall how difficult the process was, it was not that difficult because we had some budget experience (because I have been a project director for some time).

Coming up with match is a challenge for us, because most of our dollars are federal dollars, and we couldn't use those dollars as a match for our AmeriCorps program. It does take time. It was a 12 month process for us, and when I say a 12 month process, I am talking about planning the project, aligning the partners, getting those MOUs signed, setting up the host sites, and all of that. That was the lengthy process.

Amanda Gorley:

That is a question that I can not answer, but Stephanie – if you want to get out my contact information, I can forward that question to the appropriate person who can walk anyone through that process. (*Stephanie:* sure, I can do that).

Anna Huff:

I do want to add that once we received that initial grant, our subsequent applications were not as difficult. Because once you get into the pipeline and get the feel and learn what the process is and who you need to engage, it is a lot more precise undertaking – not as time consuming.

Operator:



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We do have another question from the phone lines. Our next question comes from the line of Rodolfo Pallares from California. Please proceed with your question.

Rodolfo Pallares:

Thank you. If anyone has a work readiness certificate program, how is that working for you?

Anna Huff:

We do not have a certificate program, but we are working on a new endeavor with the College of Public Health at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. We are working on a green project – we are in the planning stages – we are working with our local community college and technical college in Little Rock to create a certificate program. So I do not have any details as far as, we do not have a program at this time, but we do plan on having a program in the next 4-6 months.

Operator:

Ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to register for questions, please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone.

Valerie Pennington:

Rudy, to add onto the question you ask about the certification, Lower Mississippi Delta Service Corps has a teacher certification program that we use in connection with our local university (Delta State University). It is for the TANF recipients once they get into the program and are working with our youth, then they go through a teacher certification program.

Participant 3:

You said earlier that the application process was kind of long – is there additional technical assistance that is available through AmeriCorps to assist with that process?

Anna Huff:

Is that question for Charndrea, or anyone?

Participant 3:

I do not think she is on the line anymore, but for any of you if you took advantage of the technical assistance in that process.

Anna Huff:

There was not a lot. I am sure if we had requested more, we could have received more. But I linked up with folks who were already operating programs, and based on previous experience with the AmeriCorps program, I did not have to request a lot of technical assistance. I know that the state of Arkansas, they do have staff through the service commission who are willing to assist you. Which I am sure is the case in most states.

Participant 3:

Great, thank you.



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Anna Huff:

The other thing, Stephanie, is that we have what is called a planning meeting, normally in the fall and all the AmeriCorps project directors come together and we do a planning session and if there are some questions, at that time we deal with those issues. Like if there is some TA that someone might need, we can deal with that at that time as well.

Stephanie:

Thank you. Operator, do we have any more questions from the phone line at this time?

Operator:

No, we have no more questions from the phone line at this time. Please proceed with your presentation.

Stephanie:

Okay. Well, James, would you like to go ahead and wrap up the call?

James Butler:

Sure. Thanks everyone for participating in this call today. A special thank you to all of our speakers: Charndrea, Anna, Valerie, Amanda, and Kristal. Just listening to Amanda and Kristal certainly serves as living proof that the program does work. Last but not least, a special thanks to ICF International for all of their hard work. We hope this call was beneficial to you as you continue to work and serve in your respective communities. For your convenience, a transcript and audio recording of this teleconference will be made available for everyone within the next few weeks. Also, feel free to email anyone on the Rural Communities Initiative team if you have any further questions.

On behalf of the Office of Family Assistance, I thank you all very much, and have a pleasant day.

Stephanie:

Thank you.

Operator:

Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude the conference call for today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your lines.