

CAC AmeriCorps Advisory Committee

2020-08-18

3:00 - 4:05 pm

In Attendance: Advisory Committee Members - Ruth Ann Hanahan, Erin Rosolina, Willa Essie, Alanna McKissack, Eden Slater, Connie Flachs. CAC AmeriCorps Staff and Members – Jason Scott, Christine Doka, Lauren Bird, Mark Carper, Gordon Harless, Leah Fontaine, and Ashlee Mays.

- 1) Introductions with three new attendees: Connie Flachs (CAC AmeriCorps Member Representative), Leah Fontaine (CAC AmeriCorps VISTA Leader), and Ashlee Mays (State/National Member @ Beardsley Farm)
- 2) Openings for new committee members as Jim Gray and Joy Absher have vacated their positions (Jason Scott).
- 3) Summary of Orientation (Jason Scott): Under the confines of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CAC AmeriCorps Orientation for the 2020-2021 service year was successfully accomplished primarily through Zoom. Included in the activities of the first days were introductions, history and structure of AmeriCorps and national service, a workshop on social justice and diversity, service guidelines, and applying for nutrition and utility assistance. Midway through, the two programs, State/National (S/N) and VISTA, separated into distinctive, more service specific activities. For the S/N members, the Tremont Institute in the Great Smoky Mountains organized a series of activities to cultivate environmental-awareness in the members while for the VISTA members the Community Building Institute provided activities focused on communication. Opportunities for small group, socially distanced, outdoor gatherings were arranged, allowing for members to become acquainted.
- 4) Environmental State/National Update (Jason Scott)
  - a. The number of member slots (50) remains the same as last year's allotment, most of which have been filled. Recruitment continues for one open position, and the location for the remaining slot has yet to be determined. This is a result of the contraction of programs from COVID-19, their withdrawal or reduction in members, and our drawdown of organizations we had on our waitlist. So, we are now searching for an organization to partner with so that we may fill that slot by January.
  - b. The program's ongoing performance measures have been improvement of public lands, environmental education, and, to a smaller degree, disaster preparedness. The objective numbers for the improvement of public lands have remained achievable, but those for environmental education and disaster preparedness have had to be adjusted because of the pandemic and requirements for social distancing, which have greatly impeded those interventions. The state has been understanding and responsive to the sudden constrains, and, for this year, our objective numbers for environmental education has been reduced from 2,000 to 500 measurable interventions, the hope being that the spring of 2021 will bring more favorable conditions to continue with this endeavor, even if on a smaller scale. The disaster-related interventions, such as smoke alarm installations, remain on hold for now.
- 5) VISTA Update (Christine Doka)
  - a. There's been an increase in the program, and we now have 25 slots, including the VISTA Leader. Two lots remain open, the Florence Crittenton Agency and the CAC Office on Aging, both with a January start date.
  - b. The Summer Associates Program proved to be successful. ASAP hosted one member that created substance abuse educational materials as well as distributed medication lock boxes, Big Brothers Big Sisters hosted a member who helped with data collection on how their clients families were being affected by COVID, CAC Summer Feeding Program hosted one member who distributed over 4,000 meals to children, and Nourish Knoxville hosted one member who helped them advertise their East Side Market as well as create and distribute produce bags with unsold goods from these markets to clients at Bridge Refugee Services and Centro Hispano.
  - c. Under current circumstances the performance measures for the coming year may not be so easily attainable. The grant outlining the performance goals for the year (March 2020-March 2021) was solidified right before COVID hit, and thus, lots of in-person volunteer opportunities and client services

are not possible. However, some sites have actually increased services in response to COVID, and many members are getting creative at figuring out ways to host client services online. CNCS is generally understanding that COVID will impact performance.

- d. Will be holding an interest meeting for existing and prospective partner organizations toward November to explain the VISTA program and accept partner applications and better assess community needs to we can help address them. This meeting will give prospective sites a better understanding of what it means to host a VISTA member before filling out an in-house application to be added to the grant. Sites who decide they do want a VISTA will fill out the application by mid-December which will be reviewed by our office. Sites will have a determination of if we intend to add them to the grant by early January, and the grant writing process will take place in February. Sites that are entering their 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year of hosting a VISTA member will also be reviewed as they require a special justification in the grant.
  - e. The VISTA structure has now changed, and we are working within the Southeast Region and with a new Portfolio Manager, Andrew Heacox. The transition was a bit rocky working with CNCS representatives in various states, but it should be smooth sailing from here. Previously, CNCS program managers we worked with helped us with our grant but also with regulatory and auditing processes. The new structure allows the Portfolio Managers to focus on helping us run our VISTA program with a separate person in charge of regulatory and auditing processes.
- 6) Corporation Branding (Jason Scott): We will soon see new national branding of AmeriCorps.
  - 7) Education Program Initiative (Jason Scott): Recruitment: Exploring the potential of creating new S/N program with a focus on secondary education to facilitate college entry as well as to better connect students with AmeriCorps through part-time service (internship) or graduates from the service recipient pool. Have been conversing with the Knoxville Education Foundation and Community Schools and others currently doing things similar to this proposed program. We also see this as a means of connecting youth to equitable access to national service.
  - 8) Corps Act (Jason Scott): The Senate has passed some initial legislation to expand Corps as a response to COVID-19. Doubled this year, and then doubled again the second and third years. In addition to scaling, making the living allowance larger and non-taxable, increased ed award (doubled to \$12K). The money would be an earned benefit. Currently in discussion on both sides of the aisle. Unclear of timeline, likely tied to new stimulus bill.
  - 9) COVID-19 Adaptations (Jason Scott): We limited group size and use of remote (online / teleserve) service. The last portion of previous year this was done to smaller degree. Also, members whose service sites were affected and shrank, stipends and ed awards were still presented. We are instructing our members to follow the accepted protocol: wash hands, limit contact, stay home if ill, and wear a mask.
  - 10) Open Conversation: There were questions about member feedback and the new leadership groups for members. Feedback from the orientation was mostly positive with an average rating of 4.4 out of 5. The new leaderships groups include Media Representatives, Service Learning Initiators, and Corps Ambassadors. There will be scheduled discussion sessions on each for those interested, and the details will be covered and the roles defined.