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SERVE WISCONSIN

Date: March 20, 2020
To: Serve Wisconsin AmeriCorps Programs
From: Jeanne Duffy, Executive Director
Steven Yule, Senior Program Officer
Alexis Matthews, Program Officer
Re: COVID-19 Program Guidance

Summary: This memo related to COVID-19 restates in one place as clearly as possible Serve Wisconsin's guidance and policy for AmeriCorps grant management in response to the pandemic. Look for bolded statements on alternative service activities, compelling personal circumstances, and expenditures that empower you to act to support AmeriCorps members and serve Wisconsin. Keep a copy of this memo for your grant records.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The health of personnel and AmeriCorps members is everyone's shared priority. Serve Wisconsin directs grantees to comply with evolving guidelines from the CDC and Governor Evers and to take responsibility for communicating up-to-date information on preventing the spread of COVID-19 to AmeriCorps members, personnel, and the public. The best sources of COVID-19 information are:

Centers for Disease Control (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

WI Department of Health Services: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/

Reasonable Accommodations

If an AmeriCorps member notifies their program that they have a compromised immune system or are high risk to infection, the program should follow their reasonable accommodations procedures and determine an appropriate alternative service for the member.



Member Assistance Program

The following programs should remind your AmeriCorps members that they can access services via telephone call, text message, and online from the Empathia LifeMatters EAP/Member Assistance Program; EAP services are also available to managers/supervisors:

- Dane County Human Services
- Easter Seals Wisconsin
- Marquette University
- Marshfield Clinic – All Three Programs
- North Central Community Action Program
- Public Allies Milwaukee
- Racine Zoological Society
- Teach for America Wisconsin
- United Way Dane County – Both Programs
- United Way Fox Cities
- UW Eau Claire – ECLIPSE
- Western Dairyland EOC
- WisCorps, Inc.
- WI Dept. of Public Instruction – Farm to School

Discrimination and Confidentiality

Serve Wisconsin directs all grantees to guard against discrimination in our response to COVID-19. To prevent stigma and discrimination during service, do not make a determination to send a member or volunteer home based on race or country of origin. We know that you share our concern regarding early reports of Asian individuals in our communities being shunned or scapegoated. Also, ensure that you maintain confidentiality of any member(s) and volunteer(s) who are confirmed to have COVID-19 or other illnesses as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

LIVING ALLOWANCE AND BENEFITS

As a matter of member safety, Serve Wisconsin urges grantees to continue living allowance and program benefits to members regardless of their activities or hours completed. Those minimal funds support housing and food needs, and it is likely that shift jobs or alternative incomes will be impacted by COVID-19. Whereas Serve Wisconsin normally recommends that grantees develop a policy to not pay living allowance during a payment period in which a member records zero hours of service, we strongly encourage grantees to pay living allowance even in this scenario. Any change in policy should be documented with the effective dates in a Memo to File.

Suspension and Living Allowance

Suspension of service is a tool available to all grantees for individual, case by case, member management. Due to the long-term impact on your grant, Serve Wisconsin would most likely recommend against the suspension of a member at this time, but each situation is unique. You can review the procedures for suspension in section 5.5. Member Leave or Suspension (45 CFR 2522.230, 2540.220, and 2540.230) of the Serve Wisconsin PD Handbook.

In order to provide grantees the maximum flexibility as a result of COVID-19, CNCS has determined that AmeriCorps State and National members may be paid living allowances and benefits while they are in a Suspended from Service status if the reason for suspension is due to COVID-19. This is an exception to the regular policy that suspended members are to receive

no living allowance. Programs can also elect not to pay living allowances if they suspend their AmeriCorps State and National members. If a grantee organization decides to continue to pay members while they are in a suspended status, they must be prepared to obtain additional funding to cover living allowance and benefit expenses once members are reinstated.

If an individual is suspended for any other reason than COVID-19, the living allowance and other benefits are also to be suspended.

A member suspended due to COVID-19 activities may continue to receive the childcare benefit (for up to 12 weeks) and health care benefit provided by the grant recipient. To ensure no lapse in childcare coverage, the AmeriCorps State and National grantee must notify GAP Solutions in writing within five business days after a member's status changes. Costs incurred due to the grantee's failure to keep GAP Solutions immediately informed of changes in a member's status may be charged to the grantee's organization.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Serve Wisconsin asks you to consider the intended purpose of AmeriCorps over and beyond immediate concerns – to Get Things Done for America. Individuals who stay in AmeriCorps have a special character - they want to help and you can mobilize AmeriCorps members to make a significant difference in this time of national crisis. Your AmeriCorps grant commits to a specific program design and performance measures. In response to COVID-19, however, AmeriCorps members may be unable to perform planned activities, and you may simply determine that the community has new priorities. Serve Wisconsin urges grantees to plan alternative service for members that allows them to complete their terms, earning a full education award, and supports communities in these uncertain times. Where members *are safe and willing* to do so, they should be volunteering. Serve Wisconsin is working with state agencies and partners to support your efforts in identifying alternative service opportunities.

Effective March 2020 through the remainder of the 2019-2020 grant period, Serve Wisconsin permits grantees and their members to perform service activities in response to COVID-19 community needs that are not specifically defined in their approved grant.

For members to receive service credit for activities outside of those approved in the grant award, written permission must be obtained from the program's assigned Serve Wisconsin Program Officer. Please complete the [Alternative Service Form](#) found on our website: <https://www.servewisconsin.wi.gov/covid19>. Please note that Members and staff may not engage in any activity normally prohibited in AmeriCorps programming.

Through the COVID-19 Alternative Service Form and grantee progress reports, grantees will describe alternative service and Serve Wisconsin will monitor activities for noncompliance with AmeriCorps prohibited activities. As with any other alternative service, the program should maintain documentation of staff approval of each member's alternative service activities.

Alternative Service Opportunities can be found at: [Volunteer Wisconsin:](http://www.volunteerwisconsin.org/)
<http://www.volunteerwisconsin.org/>

RECORDING COVID-19 SERVICE HOURS

Serve Wisconsin is requiring all of its AmeriCorps programs to have its members who are engaging in activities in response to COVID-19 record service hours in a COVID-19 subcategory in their OnCorps member timesheets. Programs will have to add a COVID-19 subcategory to their member timesheets to accomplish this. There are three possible scenarios regarding adding a COVID-19 subcategory:

- Programs using an Enhanced format for OnCorps member timesheets can easily add a COVID-19 subcategory.
- Programs using the Standard format for OnCorps member timesheets and who are not already using all four available Service subcategories can add a COVID-19 Service subcategory.
- Programs using the Standard format for OnCorps member timesheets and who are already using all four Service subcategories will have to convert to using an Enhanced timesheet format. According to the 03/18/2020 OnCorps newsletter with subject Updating Timesheets for COVID-19 Response, programs needing to switch from Standard to Enhanced timesheets will have to contact the OnCorps Help Desk for assistance.

A quick review on March 18, 2020, of OnCorps timesheet formats being used by programs found that the following programs appear to be using all four Service subcategories and will need to convert to an Enhanced format: Marshfield Clinic Afterschool; Racine Zoological Society; United Way Dane County – Schools of Hope; WI Primary Health Care Association.

If program staff have any questions about these COVID-19 member timesheets requirements, please contact your assigned Serve Wisconsin Program Officer.

TELESERVICE

This is a reminder that AmeriCorps members are permitted to serve remotely, or teleserve, if the published guidance from the Corporation for National and Community Service <https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ASN%20006%20Teleservice%20Guidance.pdf> is followed:

- Written authorization of teleservice in advance
- Expectations of the communication requirements between supervisors and teleserving members
- Mitigation of the increased risk of time and attendance abuse
- Appropriate supervision including validation of the activities to be performed, and
- Verification of hours claimed

It is a best practice to first investigate the ability (e.g. access to internet) of individual members to serve remotely. Then establish a request form or process to document the procedures above.

Serve Wisconsin will also be asking grantees to submit their teleservice policy and procedures for review.

Teleservice Outside Wisconsin

Serve Wisconsin expects that all AmeriCorps member service hours recorded for grants funded through Serve Wisconsin reflect service activities performed within Wisconsin.

In times of disaster, however, such as we now experience in response to COVID-19, Serve Wisconsin may permit members to complete their service outside Wisconsin. Prior to any such program approval, grantees must consult with their Serve Wisconsin Program Officer. Such rare cases will be treated as a teleservice activity and follow a program's teleservice policy.

The AmeriCorps members must be relocating due to circumstances beyond their control, such as lost housing due to the closure of college dormitories, and/or be deploying to a disaster volunteer assignment. In all instances, the member remains under the management of the grantee.

COMPELLING PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

COVID-19 will cause extended site closures and sustained disruptions to AmeriCorps members' service that can reasonably justify a compelling personal circumstances exit under 45 CFR §2522.230 (a) Release for compelling personal circumstances. While Serve Wisconsin intends that every member shall complete their term of service this year, it is reasonable to expect that will not happen.

To be eligible for CPC, a member must first have completed at least 15% of the hours in their term of service. A CPC exit means that a member can receive a prorated education award and serve in AmeriCorps again. When exiting a member for CPC, follow your CPC policies.

Regarding documentation: *Do not include medical documentation.* The CDC has asked that such paperwork requests be avoided so as to allow medical professionals to prioritize care. For documentation instead, retain a copy of the relevant executive order from Governor Evers' ordering social distancing measures and/or announcement of school closures:

- <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO072-DeclaringHealthEmergencyCOVID-19.pdf>
- <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/SignedSchoolClosure.pdf>
- <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/DHSOrderMassGatheringsof50orMore.pdf>
- <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/COVID19/UPDATEDOrder10People.pdf>

TRAINING LIMITATIONS

In addition to alternative service, grantees may conduct training with members, including online learning. It is important to note, however, that members cannot exceed the maximum 20 percent aggregate training hours.

This is a federal rule that Serve Wisconsin has no authority to waive – 45 CFR § 2520.50: How much time may AmeriCorps members in my program spend in education and training activities? “No more than 20 percent of the aggregate of all AmeriCorps member service hours in your program, as reflected in the member enrollments in the National Service Trust, may be spent in education and training activities.”

Programs are to monitor this closely and provide instruction to members what activities are defined as training. Serve Wisconsin reminds its grantees that participation in state commission events, are required service activities. Planning time, program meetings, data collection and review, briefings on COVID-19, program feedback and reflection, as well as team development activities are reasonably tracked as part of members' community service hours. Please contact Serve Wisconsin if you need further information on the 20% training threshold.

Remember training for disaster response counts as service.

EVENTS AND TRAVEL

All in-person Serve Wisconsin meetings are cancelled through April. We do not anticipate that any grantee would charge out of state travel in March or April. Please notify Serve Wisconsin if you are planning travel outside of Wisconsin for which expenses will be charged to the grant. The ASC regional training conference in Milwaukee is being rescheduled; ASC will announce new dates when that information is available.

AMERICORPS GRANT EXPENDITURES

In a dynamic environment, grantees may see a need to spend grant funds on safety supplies, training, cellphones/tablet devices for communication, or other AmeriCorps member support costs not currently approved in the submitted budget. Additional personnel may need to support the AmeriCorps program.

Serve Wisconsin authorizes all reasonable grant expenditures in support of the AmeriCorps program effective March 2020 through the end of the grant period.

If a cost-reimbursement grantee incurs a cost not approved in the budget, please document the expense by providing a comment in the OnCorps Periodic Expense Report. Grantees are not required to receive prior approval during this time. Serve Wisconsin does not relinquish authority to disallow costs on the basis that they do not pertain to the AmeriCorps program, demonstrate a lack of fiscal prudence, or disregard prohibited activities.

At this time, Serve Wisconsin and grantees must adhere to the grantee match requirements. We recognize that grantees face a difficult fundraising environment and will continue to explore flexibility with this AmeriCorps grant structure. If there is a significant change to a source of funds, grantees are encouraged to contact Serve Wisconsin immediately.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is very important. Consider daily check-ins by phone or video to allow members to ask questions and feel less isolated. Send Serve Wisconsin unsolicited updates. Perhaps hold your first ever Facebook Live event or other virtual event to keep connections open between program staff and members.