

**Corporation for National and Community Service**  
**Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting**  
**March 25, 2019**  
**12:30 p.m. EDT**

The Board of Directors for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) convened in Washington, DC on March 25, 2019. The following members were present:

- Shamina Singh, Chair
- Mona Dixon (by telephone)

**Chair's Opening Statement**

Board Chair Shamina Singh called the meeting to order and welcomed the other Board member and attendees joining in person and on the phone. She noted that the Board terms of Rick Christman and Eric Liu had expired and expressed hope that the Senate would act quickly to approve the pending Board nominations of Victoria Hughes, who previously served on the Board, and Heather Reynolds, Managing Director of the Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame.

Ms. Singh reviewed the agenda. She would deliver opening comments, CEO Barbara Stewart would provide her report, the Board would consider a resolution to recognize former member Eric Liu for his service, and four senior CNCS leaders would report on how AmeriCorps helps members develop workforce skills and jumpstart their careers. Public comments would follow. As the minutes of the previous Board meeting had already been approved and were posted on [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov), no further action was needed on Board minutes.

**Chair's Comments on the Board's Retreat**

The retreat began with a discussion of the Transformation and Sustainability Plan with the CEO and her senior team, including Brian Finch, Director of Business Transformation. Chief Financial Officer Bob McCarty reported on budget and financial matters, including the plan to address findings in the FY 2018 Financial Statement Audit. Ms. Singh noted that addressing the audit findings and strengthening financial management are priorities for the Board and CNCS leadership, and that progress is being made to resolve the issues identified in the audit.

The Board met next with Inspector General Deborah Jeffrey. Ms. Singh noted that the Inspector General provides important oversight of the agency's program and operations, and expressed her appreciation for the consistent working relationship between CNCS senior leaders and the

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Inspector General's Office. The Board also met with Kelly Daly, leader of CNCS's Employee Union, who shared her concerns about matters affecting CNCS staff.

**Chair's Comments on the Transformation and Sustainability Plan**

Ms. Singh then shared the Board's perspective on the Transformation and Sustainability Plan, noting the Board's extensive engagement in and support for the plan. The Chair noted that the Board has discussed the plan as it has evolved over the last year and believes it is responsible and responsive to the changing needs of the agency and the constituencies that we serve. "As I said in our last meeting, the Board shares the goals of the Transformation and Sustainability Plan and agrees that changes are necessary to build long-term sustainability and position CNCS for future growth."

The Chair highlighted that although the world has changed since AmeriCorps and CNCS were created 25 years ago, the need for service remains, and evolving the agency and its functions while maintaining the focus on public service and public sector programs is and will continue to be our primary objective. "The focus and the responsibility of the organization remains on the end community organizations and the clients that those community organizations serve."

The Chair then discussed the importance of the plan in strengthening the agency for the future:

*"National service is built on a strong foundation and has achieved extraordinary results. There are longstanding challenges that have held the agency back that need to be addressed for national service to reach its potential.*

*"The plan addresses issues that the Board has been concerned about for years: improving the criminal history background check process, modernizing our information technology systems, strengthening financial management, simplifying branding, and more. The changes will improve customer service, reduce administrative burdens, fix core business functions, and make it easier for individuals and organizations to participate in our programs. Overall...this plan will not change our mission or the commitment or program funds that flow into states and communities, but it will strengthen the organizational infrastructure to allow CNCS to better support future growth of national service.*

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*“The Board appreciates how Barbara and her team have actively sought input from state commissions, staff, grantees, and projects around the country on how to implement the plan. We encourage that dialogue to continue. We also appreciate how many staff are engaged in working groups and other parts of this plan.”*

The Chair then directed her comments to CNCS staff, both at headquarters and around the country who “do an incredible job supporting national service programs.” Ms. Singh noted that she understood, from her career in both the private and public sectors, that adaptability, growth, and technology are essential factors for change strategies, and that although what CNCS is doing with the plan is not easy, it is important.

The Chair acknowledged that some staff face difficult choices about their future and reiterated the CEO’s hope that as many staff as possible will stay with CNCS to help build a stronger, more sustainable CNCS for the future. “We need your talent, we need your experience, we need your expertise, we need your heart, and we need your intellect for all that we’re embarking on over these next few years.”

The Chair praised the CNCS staff as some of the most mission-driven professionals she has ever met. She concluded her opening statement by saying, “I’m confident about the future and your ability to make changes to strengthen the agency and increase the positive impact of national service in communities and in the nation. Again, I say it’s the responsible thing to do... I will, and the Board will, continue to be engaged in the Transformation and Sustainability Plan going forward.”

Ms. Singh then thanked CEO Barbara Stewart for her service over the past year and invited her to give her report.

**Chief Executive Officer’s Report**

CNCS CEO Barbara Stewart thanked the Board members for sharing their guidance, insight, service, knowledge, and experience with CNCS. She briefly recapped her first year as CEO, highlighting the chance to meet hundreds of AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps

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volunteers, State Commissions, grantees, project sponsors, partners, and others who believe in CNCS's mission. She has felt privileged to see firsthand, and sometimes participate in, the wonderful work the agency's programs do, especially in critical areas of need, like tackling the opioid crisis, helping veterans stay in their homes, tutoring and mentoring youth, preventing elder fraud and abuse, assisting in disaster relief, and improving workforce preparedness.

Ms. Stewart made the following points about CNCS, its needs, and the Plan:

*“Over the past 25 years, national service has produced extraordinary results helping countless Americans succeed in school, find productive work, escape poverty, and achieve their potential in life. Millions of Americans have experienced the transforming impact of national service, changing their lives in powerful ways and helping them to accomplish things that they never thought possible. We've seen national service embraced by America's nonprofit and voluntary sectors, and then our core principles of local control, public-private partnerships, and citizen problem solving are right on track.*

*“But as great as our programs' initiatives are, national service continues to be challenged. I quickly learned a lot about the challenges we face when I testified before the House Education and Workforce Committee last April, two months after I joined CNCS. When people talk about baptism by fire, I suggest that event fit the description. The things I heard at that hearing affected me deeply and helped me understand that national service is a national treasure and that my top priority as CEO is to make it stronger and more sustainable for the future.*

*“This is why we took the initiative to face these challenges head on by introducing the Transformation and Sustainability Plan last May. We developed this plan after months of intensive review of CNCS programs and operations informed by a wide range of ideas and evaluations from staff, grantees, members, Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Office, and the Office of Inspector General. The feedback we received from Congress in the oversight hearing and through other meetings factored into our plan. However, most of the goals were originally envisioned in prior administrations and by our career team here at CNCS.*

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*“After announcing the plan, we spent several months in listening sessions, listening to staff, grantees, program sponsors, and other stakeholders across the country. More than 500 people attended our seven in-person and telephonic listening sessions last summer, and we received written comments from more than 260 individuals and organizations. Since last fall, we’ve also met with nearly 100 members of Congress and their staff about the plan. This input process continues today and is a valuable resource as we implement the plan.*”

*“The Transformation and Sustainability Plan is a comprehensive roadmap to improve how we serve our customers, meet community needs, and position national service for greater impact and growth. Specifically, the plan outlines major steps the Agency will take to ensure our core business functions are accountable and effective, to make it easier for individuals and organizations to participate in our programs, to strengthen our impact in communities by prioritizing evidence-based models, and to align our workforce and workplaces to better serve our customers, meet evolving needs, and ensure efficient use of public funds.*”

*“It’s important to note, as Shamina did earlier, that none of the changes in the plan take away from the programs, funds, or national service participants going to states and communities. The ultimate way we will measure success is by creating a stable platform for growth of CNCS programs and initiatives.”*

Ms. Stewart then reported on progress the agency has made on the plan, including:

- Fixing core business functions to increase capacity and better support grantees. Steps include substantially strengthening accounting systems and addressing recommendations identified in the FY 2018 financial statement audit; and bringing on a new vendor to support grantee compliance with the National Service Criminal History Checks, which over time, will improve compliance, reduce burdens on grantees, and increase efficiency in monitoring.
- Other steps have been taken to simplify processes and reduce burdens. Senior Corps implemented a new rule that significantly reduces administrative burden and duplicative work for grantees. AmeriCorps State and National increased flexibility by eliminating the 20-member minimum policy, streamlining the grant application and performance

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measures, and making changes to support fixed-price grants. AmeriCorps VISTA implemented a quarterly deadline for concept papers to apply for VISTA members, which increases opportunity and timing certainty for organizations.

- The first group of state offices will shortly transition to temporary full-time telework, which will support a smooth shift to regional offices, save money, and help retain program and grant officer positions longer. Regional offices offer a simplified point of contact to help organizations use the full menu of national service programs and administer their grants, allows CNCS to provide better customer service, ensures that national service investments go where they're needed, and puts more resources in the field to support grantees, sponsors, and local communities.
- CNCS is hiring for positions at headquarters and the regional offices to support the new structure and roles. The internal hiring process is starting. There will be more than 150 full-time, permanent jobs, 97 percent of which will initially be CNCS employee preference. CNCS highly values the experience, creativity, capability, and expertise of the CNCS staff and wants as many staff as possible to remain
- The agency is also filling key leadership roles. Erin McGrath, who has extensive knowledge of AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, will be the new Director of Regional Operations. Linda Southcott, currently Deputy Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veterans Family Program and deeply experienced in grants management and strategic planning, will lead the Office of Monitoring. The agency is reconstituting the Department of the Chief Operating Officer to strengthen core business functions and improve accountability and effectiveness, with Dana Bourne serving as Acting Chief Operating Officer.

Ms. Stewart then gave brief program updates, including:

- AmeriCorps State and National will complete its application review process this month and begin notifying organizations about \$250 million in new and re-compete awards.
- Last week, 200 AmeriCorps VISTA members completed the first revamped in-service training in Charlotte, North Carolina.
- In two weeks, 42 Pacific Region AmeriCorps NCCC FEMA Corps members will graduate, and more than half already have pending job offers. This is a tremendous testimony to how our

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programs provide pathways to employment.

- Senior Corps recently awarded more than \$13.6 million in funding to 170 organizations to support more than 50,000 RSVP volunteers. CNCS released a new report that found that Senior Corps volunteers are happier and healthier after just one year of service, thanks to reduced isolation and increased activity, and that the service Senior Companions give has substantial physical and mental health benefits for the adults they serve and for their caregivers. Senior Corps Director Deborah Cox-Roush and the Senior Corps team deserve congratulations for their work with the Department of Justice in the Elder Justice Initiative to prevent senior fraud and abuse.

Ms. Stewart concluded her report by noting that the 25th anniversaries of CNCS and AmeriCorps are major milestones that merit a look back on our history and forward to our future, stating: “After the National and Community Service Trust Act was signed in 1993, CNCS was formed from programs both established and new to make a positive impact on communities. While our programs’ initiatives each have unique histories and identities, it’s the strength of our collective effort that makes national service so powerful.

“The months ahead will witness change to our structure, but not to our mission. Our mission to improve lives, to strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering — that mission will remain the same. Our goal is to create a stronger future for national service, one that can demonstrate the value and vitality of national service programs that are proudly serving in 50,000 communities across America.”

Chair Singh thanked Ms. Stewart for an excellent report and for her leadership.

**Recognition of Service**

Ms. Singh next announced that the Board would recognize former member Eric Liu for his service on the Board and to the nation. She noted that Mr. Liu served with dedication and distinction as a member of the Board from July 2015 to December 2018 and has been a powerful voice for service and civic engagement, helping raise public awareness about the impact of national service and how service can unite and strengthen our country. Ms. Singh

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asked for a vote on the resolution. Both members were in favor; the resolution was approved.

**Introduction of Senior Leaders**

Ms. Singh introduced four senior CNCS leaders to speak on how CNCS programs develop workforce skills in members and prepare them for careers. The speakers were Mary Hyde, Ph.D., Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation; Chester Spellman, Director of AmeriCorps State and National; Gina Cross, Acting Director of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps; and Eileen Conoboy, Acting Director of AmeriCorps VISTA.

**Remarks by Mary Hyde, PhD., Director, Office of Research and Evaluation**

Dr. Hyde began her presentation with three personal stories that illustrate how pervasive the AmeriCorps experience and service-to-work story are. She then reported on key findings from research on AmeriCorps:

- Data from the annual member exit survey show that, at the end of their service year, a majority of members report that serving in AmeriCorps is a professionally defining experience.
- 87 percent of AmeriCorps host sites help members find a job after their service term.
- In a survey of AmeriCorps alumni, 80 percent say AmeriCorps benefitted their career path. Another 51 percent said that serving in AmeriCorps opened a career path they might not otherwise have considered. Of alumni employed within six months after their AmeriCorps service, 42 percent found a job via a connection they made in AmeriCorps.
- Findings from three independently-conducted studies tell us that employers agree that AmeriCorps alumni have desirable workforce skills. In one, a randomized résumé study, AmeriCorps alumni résumés were about twice as likely to advance to an interview in an actual hiring situation as non-AmeriCorps résumés. Of the supervisors contacted in the study, 41 percent hired AmeriCorps alumni, and of that group, 53 percent created new positions specifically for the AmeriCorps alumnus.
- The Employers of National Service Initiative has 580 public, private, and nonprofit employers participating, who collectively provide about 2.3 million jobs.

**Remarks by Chester Spellman, Director of AmeriCorps State and National**

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Mr. Spellman lauded the benefits of AmeriCorps for members as they enter the workforce:

- During their service terms, members gain valuable experience and soft skills such as leadership, resilience, creativity, and problem-solving that make them more attractive candidates in the job market and prized employees after hiring.
- AmeriCorps programs help 75,000 AmeriCorps members each year – and more than one million since 1994 – find careers in public, private, and nonprofit fields, including education, healthcare, the building trades, environmental stewardship, and public service. Opportunity youth and our nation’s veterans particularly benefit.
- AmeriCorps service programs help youth who are out of school and unemployed get their GED and develop marketable skills. Their service can lead to jobs and change the direction of their lives. More than 50 percent of previously unemployed, economically disadvantaged AmeriCorps members find jobs after completing AmeriCorps service.
- Green City Force is an AmeriCorps grantee that gives young adults experience in environmental sustainability and conservation that often leads to employment. In 2017, 88 percent of Green City Force AmeriCorps members who completed service found a job. A community partner recently said about the partnership: “Compared to many other applicants, these young people were better prepared, more poised, and well-mannered. All displayed a positive work ethic, eagerness to learn and achieve, and excellence follow-through.” This partner is now an Employer of National Service.
- We want to lower the hurdles our veterans face as they transition from military service to civilian life. AmeriCorps programs help them through this phase by helping them continue their education and translate their leadership skills and resilience to the workforce.
- The Corps Network’s 2019 Member of the Year Elamon White joined the VetsWork AmeriCorps program after serving as an officer in the U.S. Navy. Service in VetsWork’s environmental program gave Elamon the skills she needed to pursue her passion, environmental conservation, and she later landed a job with the U.S. Forest Service.

**Remarks by Gina Cross, Acting Director of AmeriCorps NCCC**

Ms. Cross described for the Board how in NCCC, life after AmeriCorps begins on members’ arrival day and continues throughout their service term:

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- NCCC's team-based structure gives all members continual leadership development. Graduates of the programs gain practical experience and a chance to develop core leadership competencies such as flexibility, resilience, conflict management, team building, problem-solving, oral communications, and interpersonal skills. Members' intensive growth prepares them for bigger leadership challenges in any field they pursue for the rest of their career.
- Members can pursue specialized training in areas such as disaster relief, construction, and wildland firefighting. Members have found employment with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management when completing their service hours on public lands or completing their Red Card certifications.
- NCCC FEMA Corps started partly based on a need to replenish an aging workforce.
- Seven years into the program, these teams are an integral part of FEMA's response. FEMA sees them as technologically-savvy masters of the information age. Numerous FEMA Corps alumni have become permanent FEMA staff.
- All of CNCS's disaster work contributes to workforce development. Jennifer Murphy, the lead on our Disaster Services Unit, presented at a FEMA regional conference last week and learned that several alumni are working in positions of prominence with our partner organizations and agencies – the EPA, the Red Cross, just to name a few.
- Tax preparation is another chance for teams to gain experience and certification. This not only gives them the benefit of a pathway to employment, it has a direct economic benefit for low-income communities.
- NCCC alumnus Randy Al-Ghawi served with Ms. Cross at an event the previous week. During their service, Randy said he was sitting for the Foreign Service Exam the following day, and that his experience as an NCCC team leader had not only factored into his decision to pursue this opportunity, it had taught him what he needed to succeed in the interview. He scored a 5.5 out of 7 and will be join the fellowship program upon his completion of service.

**Remarks by Eileen Conoboy, Acting Director of AmeriCorps VISTA**

Ms. Conoboy highlighted several points about the VISTA program related to workforce development:

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- VISTA benefits from age diversity. The average age of a VISTA member is 28; nearly seven percent of VISTAs who are serving are older than 50. VISTA needs and values the experience mid-career and post-retirement Americans bring to their year of service, just as we need the ideas and passion of those fresh out of high school and college.
- The VISTA program provides intensive training to members through monthly webinars and in-person in-service trainings. Topics range from grant writing and fundraising to volunteer recruitment and management and many of the soft skills Gina just mentioned. Between this training and the professional development opportunities provided by their sponsoring organizations, VISTA members come away with new or refined skills that are so needed in today's job market.
- About a third of VISTA members relocate to serve. The cross-cultural competencies people gain through the AmeriCorps programs stay with them and are invaluable in competing for 21st Century jobs.
- VISTA members who successfully complete their year of service can be hired into a federal job through a fast-track mechanism called Non-Competitive Eligibility. It's an excellent benefit for VISTA alumni, and it brings talented, mission-driven people into the federal workforce. We hope one day the same benefit will be offered to all AmeriCorps alumni.
- The approximately 8,000 VISTA members who serve our country serve in nearly 800 nonprofits. They raise money for local job training centers, recruit volunteers to help veterans make a career shift, promote college access programs, and so much more to ensure that people have access to the economic and education ladders that too often are just out of reach. More than 40 million people in the United States live in poverty today. Our mission matters more than ever.

Ms. Conoboy then introduced a short video that highlighted workforce development in action.

**Final Comments by the Board Chair**

Ms. Singh thanked the senior leaders for their presentations highlighting the skills and experience AmeriCorps members gain during their service that prepares them for jobs and careers. She noted that when we speak about national service, we most often talk about the

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positive effect on beneficiaries and communities, improvement in student reading levels, disaster survivors served, or seniors who get to live independently. But national service also has a powerful effect on the members themselves, and we should continue to point this out.

Ms. Singh observed that frequently, the barrier to filling the more than seven million unfilled jobs in the U.S. is a mismatch between positions and prospective employees' skills. National service helps close the skills gap, including in high job-growth sectors such as teaching, health services, and construction. She noted that her own employer, Mastercard, became an Employer of National Service several years ago because it knows that AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni have excellent skills and experience. Mastercard talks about having IQ, EQ – meaning emotional intelligence – and DQ, the decency quotient. People need those skills to succeed in any company, and companies know that job candidates coming out of AmeriCorps or Peace Corps have them. Ms. Singh hopes more companies will recognize that AmeriCorps produces hard-working, mission-driven leaders and will sign on as Employers of National Service.

There was no public comment period, as no one had signed up to comment, and no one came forward to comment at the meeting.

Ms. Singh thanked the members of the Board, the CNCS staff, and members of the public for joining the meeting, noted the importance of the discussion, and adjourned the meeting.