

**Governor's Advisory Board on Services and Volunteerism**

November 14, 2019; 10:30 AM – 3:30 PM

DSS Central Regional Office

1604 Santa Rosa Road, Henrico, VA

Board Members Present: Jessica Bowser, Vanessa Diamond, Ashley Hall, Seema Sethi, Julie Strandlie, James Underwood, and Sheila Williamson-Branch

Board Members Absent: Lily Beres, Elizabeth Childress Burneson, John Chapman, Omari Faulkner, Mark Fero, Terry Frye, Gina Lovett Lewis, Zachary, Tyee Davenport Mallory, Steven Valdez, Leah Dozier Walker, and Leslie Van Horn

CNCS Representatives Present: Tynetta Darden

VDSS Staff Present: Gail Harris, Roxanne Saunders, Kimberly Brown, Gail Doyle, Shannon Girouard, Samantha Lukasiewicz, Christina Dumas, Wanda Walker, and Jae-Young Choe

---

The Board Meeting was called to order at 10:48 AM by Board Chair Julie Strandlie, who greeted the Board members and Commission staff.

**Adoption of Agenda and Minutes**

The floor was opened for the adoption of minutes from the last board meeting on September 26, 2019. The motion to adopt the minutes was made by James Underwood, Ashley Hall seconded, and all approved. The floor was then opened for approval of the agenda. The motion to adopt the agenda was made, seconded, and approved.

Gail Harris reported that auditors of public accounts, APA compliance, reviewed the board minutes from last April and pointed out that Tynetta Darden and Kellie Mattingly were listed as board members. They are ex-officio members and employees of the Corporation for National & Community Services. As they are not, those minutes were corrected and the board will review at the next board meeting.

**Guest Topic: Refugee Resettlement in Virginia**

Gail Harris presented an opportunity to connect the Board's work to what's happening in and around Virginia. A sister program in the Community and Volunteerism Services division, of which the Office on Volunteerism and Community Service (OVCS) belongs, is the Office of Newcomer Services (ONS). Gail introduced its director Seyoum Berhe to provide a presentation on ONS and how it could connect to AmeriCorps.

Seyoum Berhe offered a brief background of his work, mainly involving work with refugee programs for twenty-five years. Seyoum began his presentation with the definition of what a refugee is. A refugee cannot be considered a refugee in their own native country. A refugee is a person who has entered another country in fear of persecution based on religion, race, political opinion, or membership within a certain group.

Refugee centers and coordinating teams interview families whose members are often separated with whereabouts unknown. Sometimes it could take thirty years of being held at a refugee camp in a secondary country before arriving to a third country. As Seyoum displayed a map of refugee centers in the world, he explained that upon arriving to a second country, the refugee has three choices: 1) return

to their native country; 2) resettle in a second country, learn its language, and find work; or 3) go to a western country. Fourteen federal agencies are involved in the rigorous processing of refugees. Among the many steps are interviews, identification procedures, completing applications, and cultural orientation associated with the country of resettlement.

Various organizations such as Commonwealth Catholic Charities assist refugees in the resettlement process and serve several regions throughout the Commonwealth. During the initial 90 day-support phase, The Department of State provides funding for housing, cultural orientation, English as a Second Language classes, etc. Employment and housing are found by the organizations involved. ONS also operates MYVA, or Mentoring Youth in Virginia. MYVA has a volunteer base of young refugees from 15 to 24 years of age who receive a stipend while assisting newly arrived refugees. This program helps refugees to integrate into society, understand American culture, navigate and succeed academically, and become self-sufficient.

### **Committee Meetings**

The Board meeting broke out into the Program, Communication and Special Events, and Advocacy and Public Policy subcommittees at 12:17 p.m.

### **AmeriCorps Program Presentation: Virginia Service & Conservation Corps: DCR, Division of State Parks**

At 1:00 p.m. board member Jessica Bowser introduced a guest speaker representing Virginia State Parks, Jen Allen, AmeriCorps program director for Virginia Service and Conservation Corps (VSCC). Jen Allen manages the program for the eastern region of Virginia State Parks. After providing background on the program's beginnings and its current contributions to the community and role in nature conservation, Jen introduced former AmeriCorps member of VSCC, Alana Ostrowski. Alana further explained the various training programs for AmeriCorps members such as controlled burning and trail maintenance. She also testified to the invaluable lessons and experience learned as a member and how it contributed to her current role as District 4 Resource Assistant. Finally, Virginia Governor's Fellow, Alex Frazier, presented on the collaborative roles of the Department of Conservation and Recreation and Virginia Service and Conservation Corps.

### **Committee Reports**

**Program Committee:** Vanessa Diamond commended the efforts of the AmeriCorps state commission staff for resolving compliance issues that were found among eight out of the fifteen sites regarding criminal background checks. This resulted in some corrective actions and disallowances of payments. Vanessa also reported that Jennifer Swenson of the City of Richmond's Healthy Futures Opioid Project has retired. As a result, a potential competitively funded program was lost; that program will apply for formula funding. A review panel is scheduled on December 5, 2019 to review two competitive funding applications. The RFA for formula applications should go out before Thanksgiving Day with a deadline of January 10, 2020 and a review process in early March, which Vanessa encouraged board members to attend. There will be an opportunity for a planning grant which will allow organizations in the pipeline to apply to be part of the formula funding. There will be more information to come in the next couple of weeks.

**Communications and Special Events Committee:** Seema Sethi reported that approximately 180-200 members attended the AmeriCorps Opening Day Training Event on September 27, 2019. The day included various workshops for members, and a launch ceremony.

Also 10-15 publications and flyers have been created and emails have been sent to board members to promote AmeriCorps programming. As for the annual Governor's Volunteerism Awards, 25 nominations have been received so far. The deadline is December 6.

The 2020 Virginia Volunteerism and Service Conference which will take place from May 20-21. The Board was encouraged to assist with the search for sponsors and door prize ideas. Some good leads on potential speakers have been identified, but any suggestions by the board are encouraged. There are currently 200,000 views on the Virginiaservice website and about 1,500 followers on Twitter and Facebook. The board was encouraged to share and promote AmeriCorps programming through those social media outlets. The next Day of Service is on January 20 for MLK Day.

#### **Advocacy and Public Policy Committee:**

Jessica Bowser reported that the committee brainstormed ideas on ways to advocate for AmeriCorps programs and it was decided to start small and work up from there. The idea of writing thank you letters to constituents who have supported AmeriCorps funding was further discussed and developed. The committee supported the idea of writing thank you letters during the next board meeting. A variety of letter templates would make the process simpler and easier to execute. Also discussed were ways to set up site visits for Congressmen such as Bobby Scott to visit program sites.

#### **Update on RVA Engage: Civic Impact Summit and Guiding Principles**

Vanessa Diamond shared her participation at the RVA Engage: Civic Impact Summit which took place on November 6, 2019. RVA Engage works to see how individuals and institutions can build a better ecosystem and communicate more effectively with each other. It explores what real community engagement looks like on a neighbor-by-neighbor level. Vanessa reported that Eric Liu, the keynote speaker for the event, was an incredible and inspiring speaker. A takeaway idea from Eric Liu shared by Vanessa were Civic Saturdays where multiple people of diverse perspectives come together to a table. This idea is being explored for the Richmond area.

#### **Visiting AmeriCorps Program Sites**

Julie Strandlie began discussing AmeriCorps program sites and asked the Board if any were interested in making any site visits. Jessica Bowser expressed interest in visiting a different part of the state to visit a program/site. Gail Harris offered insight into selecting which sites to visit and asked the Board to suggest easiest ways to make that happen. Tynetta Darden also suggested to the Board that they visit AmeriCorps members when they are serving for an event, thereby making the visit a larger experience. Gail Doyle offered a couple examples: An event involving Carroll County Public Schools and also College Signing Day hosted by Virginia College Advising Corps. Staff will work on setting up options for visits.

#### **Public Comment**

Julie Strandlie opened the floor for any public comments and reminded the Board that contributions can easily be made to the Virginia Service Foundation via their website.

#### **CNCS State Office Director Report**

Tynetta Darden reported that UVA was selected as one of the eight colleges for a new recruiting partnership with AmeriCorps/VISTA. One strategy is to invest resources into targeted universities to help promote service. Each school would receive \$25,000 to hire a part-time recruiter to facilitate service opportunities around the campus and vicinity.

### **Updates**

Gail Harris reported that the latest staff vacancy for Gay Plungas' position has now been filled. Analise Adams, who currently works at Shalom Farms and has a background in performance evaluation, has been hired as the new AmeriCorps Program Officer.

There still remains one board member vacancy and it's preferred to fill that spot with a member from a region other than Northern Virginia or Richmond. Gail asked the Board to think of candidates to fill the position.

Gail reported that there was one other program compliance issue. AmeriCorps Program Officers Shannon Girouard and Samantha Lukasiewicz found an issue involving a member timesheet issue and have reported it to the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

### **Final Remarks and Reminders**

The Board will meet again on February 27, 2020, and the meeting time in April is to be determined based on the Governor's Mansion availability to host the Volunteerism Award ceremony again. The Volunteerism and Service Conference will take place in May 2020.

### **Closing and Adjournment**

Julie asked for a motion to adjourn at 2:48 p.m. Jessica Bowser motioned, and James Underwood seconded the motion.

Prepared by Jae-Young Choe

Submitted by Gail Harris