Team Tennessee
Branding and Communications ToolKit

Your members are doing amazing things throughout Tennessee and their stories deserve to be told. We've put together this toolkit of information and resources to help sub-grantees successfully brand your program and communicate how you are getting things done for local communities.

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We hope this will be a helpful resource. If you have any questions about the toolkit, or for more help with your program's communications strategy, please reach out to Stephanie Houghton, Communications and Community Outreach Manager at 615-741-9237 or by email at Stephanie.Houghton@tn.gov.

Branding

Clear and consistent branding is an important part of raising the visibility of your organization, and your organization's connection to National Service and other organizations. Raising awareness of the work your program does is beneficial for recruitment, funding, and organizational sustainability.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.", but another way to think of it is communicating who you are, what you do, and why what you do matters.

Here are some initial branding considerations:

➢ Are you sharing why your program is unique and celebrating your program's successes? How and where are you sharing your program's story?

➢ Are you being consistent? Be true to your brand and design templates, brand standards, and a 'voice' for your brand – use with everything you do.

➢ Logos are an important part of communicating your brand, so make sure to integrate them when and where you can.

Co-branding, displaying more than one brand (logo) side-by-side, is a great way to reinforce partnerships and introduce your organization's services to someone who is familiar with another organization. Both brands benefit from this in a variety of ways.

Consider your own branding guidelines and develop co-branding principles before you create imagery or place another logo with your own. Also, make sure to be aware of other organizations branding guidelines so you are co-branding with the best interests of both in mind.

AmeriCorps Branding

As an AmeriCorps sub-grantee you are part of the nationwide National Service network. Consistently showing your organization's connection to AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service reinforces an emotional connection and the greater overall impact of national service.

Why National Service branding matters:

- Compliance-***It is required!*** The beginning of the program year is a great time to inventory your materials to make sure they appropriately reflect your affliation. It is recommended programs do regular branding audits to make sure you are compliant with the following requirements:
    - Display AmeriCorps **logo** on website
    - Use standardized **language** to describe the program (press releases, documents, etc.)
    - Use AmeriCorps logo on all service **gear**. You can order a variety of AmeriCorps-branded gear at nationalservicegear.org and order free national service materials at https://pubs.nationalservice.gov/.
    - Display AmeriCorps **signs** at service sites

  For Compliance and Branding Guidelines refer to "Program Branding Compliance Checklist and Requirements" and CNCS Branding Guidance.
- Reputation/Recognition- Shows that your organization is affiliated with a nationwide movement.
- Clear, consistent messaging-Using common language strengthens the National Service story.

Acknowledging Volunteer Tennessee

Per the Tennessee AmeriCorps State NOFO, all funded programs will be required to prominently display the Volunteer Tennessee and AmeriCorps logos on printed and electronic materials related to the grant.

Programs are expected to include Volunteer Tennessee's logo in all AmeriCorps communication, marketing and media materials, including, but not limited to, publications, press releases, newsletters, emails, websites, and brochures. The logo can be downloaded from the *Essential Logos* section (page 4) or you can email stephanie.houghton@tn.gov to request the logo.

Branding Best Practices

Website:

- Make sure the AmeriCorps and Volunteer Tennessee logo are displayed prominently on the organization's homepage and is easy to find
- Clearly describe your relationship with AmeriCorps
- Feature clear descriptions of service opportunities, benefits, and how potential members can apply
- Include photos of AmeriCorps members serving

Common Language:

Make sure you and your members are using key AmeriCorps terminology such as:

- *AmeriCorps member…*
  not volunteer, worker or participant.
- *AmeriCorps members serve…*
  not work or volunteer.
- *AmeriCorps programs enroll and place into service members…*
  not hire and members do not start work.
- *AmeriCorps programs exit members…*
  not fire members.
- *AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance…*
  not a wage, salary, or paycheck.

Crafting an Elevator Speech:

You and your members are important branding resources that can share your program's story in the communities you serve. An elevator speech is a brief summary that defines a product, service, or organization and its value. Crafting an elevator speech is a recommended activity for you as program staff and should be a requirement for your AmeriCorps members.

The following activity from the Minnesota Literacy Council AmeriCorps*VISTA program can be used as a tool for grantee staff and members to describe your AmeriCorps experience:

- Crafting an Elevator Speech-Minnesota Literacy Council AmeriCorps*VISTA

Essential Logos

Official use National Service logos can be found and downloaded at:
www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/communication-resources/logos

Corporation for National & Community Service

-AmeriCorps
-AmeriCorps Tennessee-The AmeriCorps logo can also be customized with a state name. Download the AmeriCorps Tennessee logo here

Volunteer Tennessee
Download the Volunteer Tennessee logo here

Additional National Service Programs

AmeriCorps NCCC
AmeriCorps VISTA

Senior Corps

- Foster Grandparents
- RSVP
- Senior Companions

Use of Logos

You must use the AmeriCorps logo to correctly brand (or co-brand) any newsletters, signage, and collateral that you create for any program activity related to your AmeriCorps grant.

Here are the guidelines for proper logo use:

- Do not alter the fonts, colors, or appearance of the logo.
- Never use the logo sideways, upside down, or placed within a shape.
- Do not run the logo smaller than ½-inch tall.
- Preserve proportions as you resize the logo – don't stretch or squeeze (maintain the aspect ratio).
- Maintain white space around the logo equal to the approximate width of the inner black circle.
- Obtain written permission before using the logo on any materials that will be sold.

If you need to confirm that your logo meets the proper usage guidelines, email engagement@cns.gov.

You can customize the AmeriCorps logo with a program name. CNCS can add your program name in the lower black area of the outside ring of the logo. The maximum length is 18 characters including spaces. To request a customized logo, please email logos@cns.gov.

Inappropriate Use of the Corporation Logo (and other National Service Insignia)

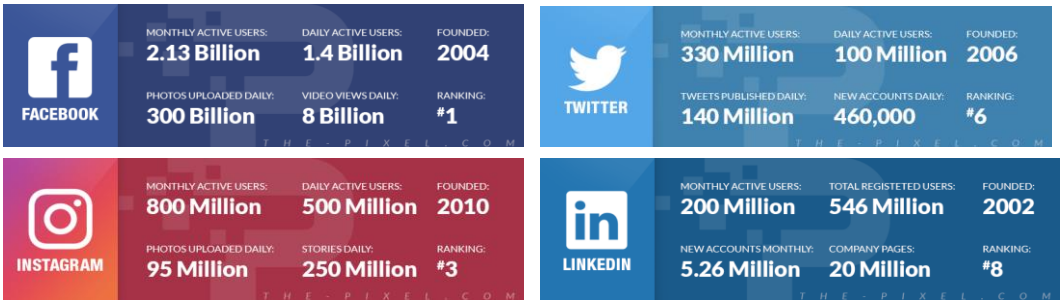
The CNCS logo (and other national service insignia) **may not** be used in any of the following ways:

- Attempting to influence legislation;
- Organizing or engaging in protest, petitions, boycotts or strikes;
- Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation or elected officials;
- Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, engaging in religious proselytization
- Supporting for-profit, commercial activities; or
- Any other manner prohibited by CNCS

Full Guidelines for using the Corporation logo and other National Service Insignia can be found here: *www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/marketing-and-media-resources/logos/guidelines-use*

Social Media

With more than 3 billion people around the world using social media each month, social media is a great way to share information on your organization and build a stronger brand. We encourage programs to take time and to use one or more of the following social media platforms:



Infographics from the-pixel.com

Wondering how often you should be sharing content? Here are the recommended frequencies for posting on popular social media platforms:
Facebook: 1 post per day
Twitter: 15 Tweets per day
Instagram: 1-2 posts per day
LinkedIn: 1 post per day

Planning out posts ahead of time is recommended. Some people create a monthly content calendar and then can spend time scheduling out posts in advance. Later in this toolkit there are ideas to help programs make a social media plan or calendar. (See "Branding and Engagement Opportunities").

Managing multiple social media sites can be challenging, so consider using a social media management tool such as Hootsuite or SproutSocial. Through social media management tools you can schedule social media content in advance. Each of these tools provide different 'insights' on your social media posts, such as how many people viewed, if people engaged (liked, commented, shared), or if you were mentioned in another social media platform. They also give you an idea, based on your audience, what days and times are best for posting.

If you don't manage or have access to your organization's social media accounts, make sure to communicate with your marketing/social media person and let them know about upcoming National Service events or occassionally send highlights and photos of your members serving so they can share or incorporate into their content calendar.

******Additionally, we encourage you to send Volunteer Tennessee pictures, great stories, and upcoming events that we can feature on our social media platforms or in our monthly newsletter. Please send this information on a regular basis to Stephanie Houghton at stephanie.houghton@tn.gov *******

Telling the Story through Photos

The best way to tell your program's story is through photos or visuals. Keep in mind the following:

- Use photos of AmeriCorps members in action–make sure to add the AmeriCorps logo to the photo or capture shots with members in AmeriCorps gear (with the logo visual).
- Photos should be 'action-based' with members engaging volunteers and out in the community. They should have the AmeriCorps logo visible and clear as much as possible. Photos can be staged as well as candid, to have a good variety.
- Make sure you have photo releases!
- You can create graphics through sites like Canva.com (free) or Snappa.com (free). Creating your own graphics allows for you to share specific information about your programs (data, photo collage, infographics and more)
- Remember to include a graphic or video on every social media post. It grabs attention and reinforces the AmeriCorps brand.

Which picture tells the story better?

What story are we telling?

Hashtags

A hashtag is simply a keyword phrase, spelled out without spaces, with a pound sign (#) in front of it. The hashtag is a popular means of categorizing content on social media. Hashtags are used on all the most popular social networks and allow for your posts to be easily discovered in searches and widens your reach.

Hashtags to include in your posts:

- #AmeriCorpsWorks
- #AmeriCorps
- #NationalServiceWorks
- #VOLTN

Tips for using hashtags:

- Be Specific-the more specific you are the more targeted your audience will be.
- Sync with official campaign tags- Make sure to use the specific hashtag created for events or campaigns. (Examples #MLKDAY, #AmeriCorpsWorks, etc)
- Don’t over hashtag- use hashtags sparingly and only when they add value. Use them too much they can be confusing, and annoying.

Social Media Links: Who to Follow and Tag

Corporation for National & Community Service
www.nationalservice.gov

/nationalservice

nationalservice.tumblr.com

AmeriCorps

/americorps

When using social media channels to amplify any story related to your AmeriCorps grant, be sure to tag @AmeriCorps.

Volunteer Tennessee
www.volunteertennessee.net

/volunteertennessee

/volunteertn

/volunteertnservice

Programs are strongly encouraged to follow/like/share Volunteer Tennessee's social media platforms for the latest updates. It is incredibly helpful that you tag Vol TN when sharing information about your program on social media.

AmeriCorps Alums
www.americorpsalums.org/

/americorpsalums

Service Year
https://serviceyear.org/

/ServiceYear

America's Service Commissions
www.statecommissions.org

/statecommission

/statecommissions

Your organization's partners and service sites

Branding and Engagement Opportunities

Special National Service Events

Volunteer Tennessee strongly encourages programs to identify and invite the Volunteer Tennessee Commissioners and staff, local elected officials, local media, business partners and community partners to ensure an active event that shows the strength of the statewide partnership.

The following are national events that many AmeriCorps programs participate in. They are great opportunities to promote your program and engage with the national service community!

Event	When?
Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Third Monday of January each year
AmeriCorps Week	Third week of March
National Volunteer Week	April
National Service Recognition Day	First Tuesday in April
September 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance	September 11
National Swearing-in Day for AmeriCorps	October
Make A Difference Day	October

CNCS Engagement Plan

CNCS has previously created a yearly *Public Engagement, Outreach, and Education Plan* that can be a helpful resource for planning events and/or creating an outreach and social media plan. The plan includes a calendar of monthly focus areas:
www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS_2017_Public_Engagement_Plan_and_Calendar_FINAL.pdf

AmeriCorps Member Identity

Another important part of branding is your program's members who are getting things done in local communities. It is important that members also have a clear understanding of their connection to national service.

A reminder, on the grant application regarding AmeriCorps member identity, programs have agreed to the following:

- AmeriCorps members will wear the logo every day
- AmeriCorps members will create and deliver elevator speeches
- Prominently display the logo on their websites

Member Impact Stories

A great branding opportunity is to regularly feature impact stories from current members and alums on your organizations social media, newsletter, or website.

Ask your AmeriCorps members to write up a reflection on their service. Utilize the *Crafting an Elevator Speech* activity on page 3, but here are some key questions to ask for an impact story:

- What led you to serve?
- What is a concrete example of the impact of your service?
- What skills have you developed?
- What challenges have you overcome?
- What will you do after this service year? (Current members) How did your service shape your future? (Alums)

How Are Your Members Telling the AmeriCorps Story?

Think about the following:

- Are they promoting a consistent message on social media?
- Are they portraying your program, AmeriCorps, CNCS, Volunteer Tennessee in a positive and impactful way?
- Are they maintaining a professional presence on social media?
- Are they using the key AmeriCorps terminology (“I am an AmeriCorps member serving with….”)

More than 75,000 Americans across the country participate in AmeriCorps each year. Last year, more than 1,200 AmeriCorps members met pressing local needs across Tennessee. Support your members by sharing their impact and helping them understand their role in the greater National Service network.

Additional Resources

CNCS Communications and Branding Resources:

Many resources can be found here:
https://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/communication-resources

- Branding Guidance from CNCS
  www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/AmeriCorpsSeniorCorpsBrandingGuidance-.pdf
- CNCS Marketing and Media Resources
  www.nationalservice.gov/resources/marketing-and-media
- 2018 Communications Guide
  http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018%20Grantee%20Communications%20Toolkit%20508.pdf

Additional Branding Resources:

- Program Branding Compliance-Volunteer Tennessee has a checklist and quick guide to all the AmeriCorps Branding Requirements

Social Media Resources and Tips:

- How to Use Hashtags on Twitter, Facebook & Instagram:
  https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/hashtags-twitter-facebook-instagram#sm.0000gy9a2xfwdeu9xuy21ikt0fddn

- How Often To Post On Social Media? [Proven Research From 14 Studies]:
  https://coschedule.com/blog/how-often-to-post-on-social-media/

- A Strategic Guide to Social Media for Nonprofits:
  https://sproutsocial.com/insights/nonprofit-social-media-guide/