

October 29, 2008

Greetings,



My name is Ron Lessard. I am from the Mohawk and Abenaki tribes. It is my honor to serve as the new Strategic Advisor for Native American Affairs for the Corporation for National & Community Service. In this senior-level position I function as the agency's primary liaison to Native communities and the organizations and federal agencies that serve them. I will advocate for Native American communities at the Corporation working across all program and support units to increase Native American participation in national service, develop and enhance programming to address the unique needs of Native American communities, promote coordination among the agency's programs and partners, collect information on challenges facing Native American communities and evaluate progress.

Due to the restrictions in funding under the current Continuing Resolution (CR), the Corporation for National and Community Service will not be holding a National Conference on Service in Indian Communities in 2008.

We want to assure all Tribal grantees, Tribal leaders, community leaders, Corporation staff and other key partners that the decision to not hold a 2008 National Conference on Service in Indian communities is in no way an indication that the Corporation is decreasing its dedication and commitment to Indian communities. Going forward we want to assure you that we will continue to support and expand activities in Indian Communities.

The Corporation has initiated several new steps to strengthen support for Native American Communities as demonstrated by the examples below.

- Last year, more than 11,700 Native Americans served as Learn and Serve America participants through 622 tribal and non-tribal programs. In addition to the funding currently supporting Tribal Learn and Serve grantees, CNCS announced \$985,885 in new Learn and Serve America grants to six tribal nations to make young people part of the solution to the meth crisis, which is wreaking devastation in Indian communities and rural areas across the U.S. The new grants also complement anti-meth efforts by the National Congress on American Indians (NCAI), which has issued a national call to action to curb meth use.
- **The Senior Corps Demonstration Program: Tribal Elder Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**  
Two existing Tribal Foster Grandparent Programs received funding through a partnership with the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) and the Corporation to test models where volunteers age 55 and over will provide respite and assistance to Tribal Elders who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren.
- The Corporation is joining the DOJ (*Office of Justice Programs, Community Oriented Policing Services, Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys, Office of Tribal Justice, and Office*

*of Violence Against Women; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (SAMHSA) Indian Health Service (IHS), Office of Minority Health (OMH), BIA, HUD and the Small Business Administration) and other federal agencies in the planning of the government-to-government consultation, training, & technical assistance (CTTA) sessions with tribal communities.*

- The website was enhanced to include the section For Indian Communities. This section of the website describes the ways the Corporation is involved in helping to strengthen Native communities. It also provides links to fact sheets, program lists, funding resources, and a variety of other useful materials.
- AmeriCorps State/National Tribal programs assist Tribal elders with repairs, fuel assistance, home weatherization, and other support to help them remain in their homes and live independently. Tribal programs also assist Tribal elders with the development of cultural education projects focusing on traditional civic engagement and civic pride. Tribal programs assist elders with the development of cultural education, mentor youth, tutor and assist parents and caregivers by educating them in constructive methods of proactive family management and address school safety issues using substance abuse and gang intervention activities.
- AmeriCorps NCCC applicants aged 18 – 24 are recruited year round for full time, residential service. Highly trained members support disaster relief and recovery, firefighting, and other compelling needs in a team based environment. Opportunities for Native Americans to develop work skills, travel the country, earn a living allowance and education award, receive health care, and make a difference.
- More than 250 AmeriCorps VISTA positions serving with 48 projects in 27 states provide outreach to remote, underserved Native communities. The expansion of youth involvement in community programs has provided leadership and program development to Native Alaskans. Also developed are programs that build capacity for local organizations to serve Native women dealing with domestic violence or sexual assault, and educational curricula for urban Indian youth in the foster care system.
- AmeriCorps VISTA Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) was conducted throughout the country this past year. VISTAs spend the first three days of PSO in small groups exploring the mission of VISTA, the causes and effects of poverty in America, their roles as VISTAs. On the last day of the orientation, participants choose one of three focused skill-building sessions that best fits with their VISTA service activities. Supervisors explore the unique roles of supervision in context of VISTA. An additional day of training precedes the Supervisor's Orientations in the Southwest region to specifically address Tribal issues.
- VISTA demonstration project: In partnership with the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), the 1,000 Ways to Fight Abuse campaign was launched, where

\$1,000 mini-grants are awarded to Tribal communities to fight abuse – particularly methamphetamine and domestic violence.

We will reach out to Tribal grantees, Tribal leaders, community leaders, and other key partners to strategically plan for the year ahead. We will work together to identify community goals and focus areas for the future, identify and implement systematic methods for communication, identify the best education and training tools such as Webinars and other distance learning tools and design future planning and visioning documents. In the coming months we will have discussions on several issues and explore all the available options of coming together including the option of holding a National Conference on Service Indian Communities in 2009. We will provide several opportunities for your input and call upon your expertise, wisdom and knowledge of your communities to help set the direction of our programs and trainings for the future.

I look forward to your suggestions and appreciate your ongoing willingness to help sustain and expand National Service in Indian Communities. I invite you to contact me so that I might become better acquainted with your needs and provide you with the resources needed to serve Indian communities.

Sincerely,

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