Dear AmeriCorps VISTA Sponsors,

As you are likely aware, a lapse in federal appropriations commences at midnight Monday, September 30, 2013. As a result, nearly all CNCS employees are on furlough as of October 1 at 12:01 a.m., including all Program Specialists, Grants Management Specialists, Grants Officers, and their supervisors. During the furlough period, these employees are not permitted to work in any capacity, including checking email and phone messages. We are sending this letter to you because we understand that periods of furlough raise many questions that we can answer in advance, and because we know that a funding lapse means that we will be unable to provide you with customer service and support during that time.

First, about your existing AmeriCorps VISTA Projects:

- If you have an active Memorandum of Agreement, keep operating your program and supporting your AmeriCorps VISTAs.

- AmeriCorps VISTAs who are supported by cost-share agreements will continue to receive living allowance payments according to the schedule, and cost-share invoices will continue to be processed.

- AmeriCorps VISTAs that are not cost-share will accrue their living allowance but will not receive payments until government operations resume. As you can understand, this may create some uncomfortable situations in project sites, particularly those that include both cost-share and standard AmeriCorps VISTA positions. We ask your sensitivity in approaching the issue if it arises at your project site.

- eGrants will also remain available, though Help Desk support will be limited.

Next, if you receive grant funds from AmeriCorps VISTA for supervision or transportation, and the budget period ends while the government is shut down:

- CNCS cannot close out your grant, review or potentially award a new or continuing grant, or extend any dates.

- You may continue operating your program after the budget period, BUT:
  - You cannot spend any CNCS funds, even if they are "left over" from the grant that ended.
  - We cannot promise reimbursement for any expenses you incur, even if a future new or continuing grant would be likely to cover them, because we have no way of knowing what funding will be available to award/continue grants when government reopens. You will be operating your program without federal financial support.

- If you have a current Support grant, Health and Human Services has assured us that the Payment Management System will be available for drawing down funds and reporting on expenditures. They will, as a federal agency, have limited staff available to respond to inquiries.

Please track questions that come up during the furlough period. When the government reopens, send those unanswered questions to your Program Specialist or Grants Management Specialist as appropriate, and she or he will respond as quickly as possible. Thank you in advance for your understanding.

Sincerely,
Frequently Asked Questions: Lapse in Federal Appropriations
AmeriCorps VISTA

1. What if I have issues or questions about service benefits (e.g., health care, child care, life insurance, worker compensation) during a lapse in federal appropriations?
Contact the National Service Hotline at 1-800-942-2677 with questions or issues.

2. What if I have questions or issues about my Segal Education Award?
AmeriCorps Trust technicians will be available to answer questions and to process education award requests. The Trust technicians can be reached via the National Service Hotline at 1-800-942-2677.

3. Will I continue to receive living allowance payments during a funding lapse?
Living allowance payments will cease during a funding lapse for the majority of VISTAs. Those VISTAs will be paid retroactively once the funding lapse has ended. However, if you are serving at a VISTA grant-supported project or your position is funded via a cost share agreement, you will continue to receive your living allowance during the funding lapse. To clarify how your VISTA position is funded, ask your supervisor whether you will continue to receive your living allowance.

4. Can my sponsor provide me an advance of emergency funds to assist with an emergency, as stated in the Memorandum of Agreement?
Yes. An advance of emergency funds up to $500 is available from your sponsoring organization for emergencies as described in the VISTA Member Handbook. Once the funding lapse has ended the sponsor will work with the Corporation State Office to be reimbursed for the advanced funds.

However, asking the sponsor for funds during the funding lapse to cover rent, utilities, or daily expenses is a loan made between individuals whose conditions would be agreed upon by you and the sponsor. You and the sponsor would be responsible for complying with those conditions; the Corporation and VISTA are not party to such an agreement.

5. In the event of an emergency, whom do I contact?
In the event of an emergency, contact your supervisor and the National Service Hotline at 1-800-942-2677.

6. May I still access My.AmeriCorps.gov?
Yes. The My AmeriCorps portal (my.americorps.gov) will be accessible during a funding lapse. For technical assistance with the portal, contact the National Service Hotline toll-free at 1-800-942-2677.

7. If I choose to terminate my VISTA service early during a funding lapse due to serving without a living allowance, is that considered a compelling reason for early termination?
Yes, but only if you are not receiving a living allowance during a funding lapse. If you are serving in a grant-supported or cost share project, and are therefore receiving a living allowance, the criteria set forth in VISTA policy to determine compelling reasons for early termination will be applied.
8. If there is an appropriation lapse, but the government reopens prior to the next pay period, will the VISTAs be paid during the next pay period?
When the lapse in appropriated funds ends, living allowance payments will be made as soon as possible, allowing time for the administrative process.

9. Can VISTAs take a job during the appropriation lapse?
No, the terms and conditions of VISTA service remain in place.

10. Will CNCS be contacting VISTAs directly regarding the appropriation lapse?
Yes, CNCS may send email messages, if necessary, to inform VISTA members of new relevant information using the email address in the member’s My AmeriCorps account.

11. If there is a lapse, and a VISTA decides to terminate for economic hardship, how do sponsors communicate this to CNCS if CNCS staff is furloughed?
Sponsors should send email communication to the appropriate state office staff as soon as possible, and indicate the termination in the sponsor verification form in My AmeriCorps. CNCS staff will process terminations and other actions as soon as funding is appropriated and staff return to work.