

2019 AmeriCorps State Funding Opportunity Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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A. General/Grant Application

- A1) If an organization is planning on submitting multiple applications, should they submit multiple Notices of Intent?
CV Response: While the Notice of Intent is not required, it does help CV to anticipate the volume of applications to be submitted. If an organization is planning on submitting multiple applications, please complete Notices for each.
- A2) Would an applicant seeking funding for a program which received funding in the past, but not in the most recent grant year (i.e., funding ended in the 2016-17 program year), be categorized as recompeting?
CV Response: An applicant in this case would be categorized as a Previously Funded Applicant.
- A3) How would a current AmeriCorps grantee applying as the legal applicant for another program that is new to the agency be categorized for this application?
CV Response: This grantee would be considered a previously funded applicant.
- A4) If a legal applicant is applying to implement a portion of a previously funded program, would this meet the definition of “same project” or would it be considered a different project? Would the applicant be submitting a recompeting application in this case, or are they considered a previously funded applicant?
CV Response: If the portion of the previously funded program satisfies the definition of “same project” in the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance, then it would be considered the same project. The applicant would be considered a recompeting applicant if the applicant has completed a three-year cycle (in most instances) or is entering the final year of their grant period (i.e. programs entering year 3 of the grant period, or programs that received a one-year operating grant from CV).
- A5) If an applicant has received funding for other CNCS programs, such as VISTA, in the past, would they be considered previously funded?
CV Response: An applicant who has only received funding for VISTA, Senior Corps, or any other CNCS program (with the exception of a CV-funded AmeriCorps State program) would not be considered a previously funded applicant for this RFA. They would be considered a new applicant for this RFA.

- A6) How can an applicant without previous AmeriCorps experience be competitive?
CV Response: Applicant responses to selection criteria are what CV uses to assess application quality. Applicants who successfully demonstrate that they can fully address the selection criteria will be scored accordingly. Past program performance is a factor in the review process, but previous experience with AmeriCorps is not a requirement. CV encourages new applicants to apply for AmeriCorps grants. To help to level the competition among experienced and new applicants/programs, new applicants may receive up to an additional 10% of the total possible score at each review stage. Applicants that have received a planning grant from CV are not eligible for the additional 10% point consideration.
- A7) Is there a limit on the amount of grant funds I may request?
CV Response: There is no limit on the amount of grant funds that you may request if it falls within the cost per MSY requirements. However, your level of requested funding should make sense for your proposed program design, desired impact, and the capacity of your organization.
- A8) Does an applicant need to already be a grantee of CaliforniaVolunteers to receive a Capacity Building AmeriCorps grant?
CV Response: Any applicant may apply for a Capacity Building AmeriCorps grant.
- A9) Are there any opportunities for Planning Grants in this RFA?
CV Response: There are no planning grants included in this RFA.
- A10) In meeting the community partnership requirement, can we count our organization as one of the public or private partners?
CV Response: Yes, your organization can be counted as one of the three organizations to meet the minimum requirement.
- A11) If the legal applicant is a private non-profit and will partner with multiple private non-profit partners, is this sufficient to meet the partnership requirement? What is an example of a public partner?
CV Response: No; in this example, the applicant still needs to have a public partner to satisfy the partnership requirement. All applicants are required to develop a partnership of at least three organizations that includes at least one public and one private partner. For examples, a public partner could be a school district or the county's Department of Health and Human Services. A private partner could be a foundation or community non-profit.
- A12) Will applicants that are unable to identify a public entity for the requirement community partnerships be disqualified?
CV Response: Not necessarily. We want to see public and private partners as an indication of the community involvement or commitment to the program. However, there may be situations where it is difficult or otherwise not possible to

obtain the support of a public partner. In this case, describe your partnership in the Program Summary Form and, in the Organizational Capability section of the Program Narrative, speak to the situation the program faces and why public partners were not identified.

A13) Is more than one placement site a requirement or can all members be hosted at one site?

CV Response: There's no requirement on the number of member placement sites that a program has to have. The number of members at each site and the number of sites where members will be placed to serve should make sense for your proposed program design, desired impact, and the capacity of your organization and partners.

A14) Is an applicant locked into the proposed service locations/member placement sites or can they change them later in the process?

CV Response: We anticipate that applicants have a well thought out plan for their project implementation and have identified operating sites based on the demonstrated community needs. We expect the sites proposed at the time of application to align with those involved in project implementation. However, if necessary, an applicant can modify their list of operating sites during the clarification process or prior to contracting, if selected.

A15) Is the Executive Summary considered a part of the Program Narrative, and does it count towards the page limit?

CV Response: Yes.

A16) Can we include charts in the Program Narrative? Can they be single-spaced?

CV Response: Yes. Charts are acceptable in the Program Narrative and may be single-spaced. However, if your application is selected for the national grant competition or for funding, you will later need to convert any charts into narrative in order to submit your application in eGrants to be awarded.

A17) Should programs use links to research in the narrative? Is it realistic to think that peer/staff reviewers will use a link to read additional information?

CV Response: Reviewers will not view links in an application. The applicant has to provide sufficient information in the application narrative to describe the evidence that is being used to describe the community need or to support the program intervention. Applicants classifying their evidence as Preliminary, Moderate, or Strong may submit up to two studies, evaluation reports, briefs, or peer-reviewed articles cited in this section as separate attachments. Please refer to the RFA and Application Instructions for guidance on submitting such documents.

A18) If an agency is applying for a capacity building grant, should the evidence base section contain evidence supporting the capacity building approach to be used? Or should it show evidence for the direct services provided by the volunteers?

CV Response: The evidence-based section should contain evidence supporting the program intervention to be delivered by AmeriCorps members that will address the community need(s) identified and lead to the desired outcome(s).

A19) Can a legal applicant submit more than one application for funding?

CV Response: A legal applicant can submit applications for multiple programs if they are sufficiently distinct in focus and the legal applicant adequately demonstrates their capacity to manage both programs.

A20) Does the 10,000 character limit for the Data Collection Plan/Evaluation Plan include spaces?

CV Response: Any character limit includes spaces.

A21) Who is the signatory on the Labor Organization Certification form? What documentation is required for this form?

CV Response: The legal applicant representative (someone with signing authority from the applicant organization) should be the signatory on the Labor Organization Certification form.

If Concurrence is required, written concurrence from the applicable labor organizations must be submitted with the application.

If consultation is required, you must include a written description of how the legal applicant will ensure that 1) AmeriCorps members won't be placed in position that were recently occupied by paid staff; and 2) no AmeriCorps member will be placed into a position for which a recently resigned or discharged employee has recall rights as a result of a collective bargaining agreement, from which a recently resigned or discharged employee was removed as a result of a reduction in force, or from which a recently resigned/discharged employee is on leave or strike.

If neither concurrence nor consultation is required, include a written justification of how you determine this option applied to your organization.

A22) How does an applicant indicate it is applying for a fixed amount grant?

CV Response: Since all applicants are required to provide a budget as part of their application, applicants may indicate on the Program Summary form that they are applying for a Fixed Amount grant by selecting one from the Grant Type field. In order to be considered for a Full-Time, Professional Corps, or Education Award Program Fixed Amount grant, applicants must meet all requirements outlined in the *Request for Applications* and *Mandatory Supplemental Guidance*.

A23) Can you provide examples of other grantees' Member Development and Strengthening Communities performance measures? It would be helpful to know how other programs have approached these measures successfully.

CV Response: Successful applications from previous years may be requested as part of a Public Records Act request. However, the Member Development and Strengthening Communities performance measures are common measures across all programs that follow a standard format. Specific volunteer activities or

member trainings are determined by the program and vary widely by program. Choose the activities and trainings that are most appropriate for your program design and that most effectively prepares and supports members in their service and in connecting them with their community.

- A24) Can we submit a Member Training Plan if we are not a new program?
CV Response: Yes, you may submit a Member Training Plan even if you are not required to do so. However, rather than relying on the review process to get feedback and clarification on your plan, it would be more appropriate to discuss your training plans with your Program Officer after the application has been submitted to work towards strengthening the trainings you already provide.
- A25) If we are submitting an Evaluation Report, do we need to complete the Evaluation Plan?
CV Response: All re-competing applicants are required to submit an Evaluation Plan.
- A26) Our organization will not have an audit completed in compliance with the application requirement by the due date. Is there anything we can do to satisfy the requirement without an audit?
CV Response: All applicants are required to submit audited financial statements or an audit in compliance with the Uniform Administrative Guidance (as applicable) to be considered for AmeriCorps funding. If an audit is scheduled but will not be completed until after the application is due, a memo that includes the date the audit will be complete is sufficient to move forward with application review. Your application will be withdrawn if an audit is not submitted when expected.

B. Funding Priorities and Selection Criteria

- B1) What do the listed funding priorities mean for funding distribution?
CV Response: Neither CV nor CNCS uses set asides for priority areas; the identified funding priorities are intended to encourage programs in those areas to apply.
- B2) Will my program receive more priority for selecting more than one Focus Area and/or more than one National Performance Measure?
CV Response: No additional preference is given for selecting more than one Focus Area and/or more than one National Performance Measure.
- B3) If a program will serve beneficiaries from the priority neighborhoods but members are not physically placed in those areas, how would that be reflected in the Strategic Grant Characteristics form in the application?
CV Response: Do not check the box on the Strategic Grant Characteristics. Instead, be sure to make clear that beneficiaries will be from one of the priority neighborhoods in the Program Narrative.

- B4) For the Economic Opportunity priority area, do AmeriCorps members need to be serving opportunity youth, or can the AmeriCorps members be opportunity youth that are achieving workforce preparation through service?
CV Response: Programs must engage opportunity youth as members or beneficiaries in order to qualify for the Economic Opportunity priority area. Opportunity youth are economically disadvantaged individuals ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school or work.
- B5) For the Education priority area, Intervention #12, is this outcome limited to just math?
CV Response: Yes, the priority outcome is limited to what is listed in the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance. You are still able to apply for a program that focuses on other subjects, but they would not fall under this priority.
- B6) Does third-party research of a comparable program count as evidence, or does evidence pertain only to research that has been conducted on the specific proposed program?
CV Response: If the research of a comparable program is high-quality and includes characteristics that are similar enough to be relevant to your proposed program design, you may include that as evidence. In this case, you will likely qualify for the Pre-Preliminary evidence tier.
- B7) We are a formula funded program with a grant below \$500,000, so we have not been required to have an external, independent evaluation. The Education priority area indicates that at least a Moderate level of evidence is required. Could we request to waive that requirement or use our internal evaluation to qualify for Moderate evidence?
CV Response: The requirement to have evidence at the Moderate or Strong level is only to be considered for the Education priority area; you may still submit an application in the Education focus area and be considered for funding.

C. AmeriCorps Members

- C1) Can AmeriCorps members take the place of current staff or volunteers at my organization?
CV Response: No. AmeriCorps members may not displace staff or volunteers at your organization, nor may they perform any services or duties that would supplant the hiring of employed workers.
- C2) Are there certain activities in which AmeriCorps members and staff cannot engage?
CV Response: Yes. While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or CNCS, staff and members may not engage in the activities described in [45 CFR § 2520.65](#).

- C3) Are programs required to provide health benefits to less than full time members serving in a full time capacity?
CV Response: Less than full-time members who are serving in a full-time capacity for a sustained period of time (e.g. a full-time summer project) are eligible for healthcare benefits. Programs may provide health insurance to less than full-time members serving in a full-time capacity, but they are not required to do so. A member is considered to be serving in a full-time capacity when his/her regular term of service will involve performing service on a normal full-time schedule for a period of six weeks or more.
- C4) Are we required to provide healthcare for members through our staff insurance plan, or are there other options to meet the healthcare requirement?
CV Response: Per the [2018 AmeriCorps Specific Terms and Conditions](#), any of the following health insurance options will satisfy the requirement for health insurance for full-time AmeriCorps members (or less than full-time members serving in a full-time capacity): staying on parents' or spouse plan; insurance obtained through the Federal Health Insurance Marketplace of at least the Bronze level plan; insurance obtained through private insurance broker; Medicaid, Medicare, or military benefits. AmeriCorps programs purchasing their own health insurance for members must ensure plans are minimum essential coverage (MEC) and meet the requirements of the Affordable Care Act.
- C5) If we are a nonprofit applying for an AmeriCorps grant, do we need to offer healthcare if our partner university is offering it to our members?
CV Response: At the time of application, you will need to ensure that all full-time AmeriCorps members will be offered healthcare as part of their service. If your members will receive their healthcare coverage through a university partner, you will be responsible for maintaining documentation of coverage for all members in service.
- C6) How do programs recruit AmeriCorps members?
CV Response: It is the program's responsibility to recruit enough members to fully enroll all awarded member slots. Programs can advertise and recruit from any source, as long as the members recruited are eligible to serve. Programs will have access to the CNCS My AmeriCorps Portal to post service opportunities, but may also utilize other platforms.
- C7) Do AmeriCorps members need to be placed at different sites out in the community or can they be stationed at the grantee's office?
CV Response: AmeriCorps members can be placed at partner sites in the community or be centrally located with the grantee; it all depends on the program design and the legal applicant's capacity to manage members. Applicants can propose the design that best suits their program needs and justify it in the Program Narrative.

D. Budget/Match Requirements

- D1) How do we determine our budget? How much of the grantee match must be cash? What is the match requirement for living allowance?
CV Response: The budget should be determined based on your organization's needs/resources and the structure of your proposed program. There is no

required percentage for the portion of grantee match that must be cash. There is also no specific match requirement for living allowance; it may be covered by CNCS funds, non-federal cash match, or a combination of both.

- D2) Can we use this grant to pay for general organizational expenses?
CV Response: No. AmeriCorps grants are only for costs directly related to implementing the proposed project, not general organizational expenses. Fundraising costs, including raising funds to meet your AmeriCorps grant matching costs, are considered general organizational expenses and cannot be paid with grant funds. However, to a limited degree, you may capture indirect administrative costs related to your AmeriCorps program. The Application Instructions provide guidance on charging administrative costs to the grant.
- D3) How will living allowance costs be covered if it exceeds our program's proposed Cost per MSY?
CV Response: As stated in the RFA, in most instances the Cost per MSY or the grant received by an applicant will not cover the full amount of the living allowance provided to members and the applicant must use its own or other resources to supplement member living allowance. It is up to the applicant what costs will be covered by the organization in match and what will be covered by the CNCS share, as long as the required match percentage for the total budget is met.
- D4) If an applicant is a previously funded applicant, does it affect the maximum Cost per MSY that can be requested or the percentage of match that must be provided?
CV Response: Maximum Cost per MSY is not tied to program age. Match is tied to the number of years the same program has been funded through CV. Previously funded applicants whose last AmeriCorps grant was received more than five years ago are considered "new" per AmeriCorps regulations for the purpose of determining match level required, and are required to match at least 24% of the project's total Operating Costs. Previously funded applicants proposing the same program design as their AmeriCorps program that was funded less than five years ago are required to match at the level established for the number of years the proposed program has received AmeriCorps funding.
- D5) Does the minimum of 20 MSYs correspond to a minimum living allowance cost of \$279,840 to the organization?
CV Response: The minimum program size is 20 MSY. The 20 MSY can be made of multiple slot types (for example, 20 half-time members and 10 full-time members make up 20 MSY). Only full-time members are required to receive a living allowance of \$13,992 minimum and \$27,984 maximum. The living allowance may be supported by the federal share of the budget, by matching funds, or by a combination of both.
- D6) Can federal work-study be used as match funds?

CV Response: Federal work-study or other federal funds may be used as match funds as long as a program has received approval from the other federal agency to use their funds for match on an AmeriCorps grant.

- D7) Can other state or federal grants be used as match funds?
CV Response: State grant funds may be used as match for an AmeriCorps State grant. In order to use federal grant funds as match, you must demonstrate that the administering agency has approved those funds to be used as match for an AmeriCorps State grant.
- D8) Does the required full-time AmeriCorps-dedicated staff person need to be reflected 100% in Section 1 A of the budget?
CV Response: Yes. The full-time staff member whose time is fully dedicated to the AmeriCorps grant must be reflected 100% in Section 1 A of the budget.
- D9) Can payroll be administered by a third party?
CV Response: Yes, if needed.
- D10) Budget Section 1, line H: We are doing a large program evaluation with an external entity, but it costs above \$750/day in total and therefore cannot be included in the budget. We mention it in our narrative. Is this OK?
CV Response: It is allowable to include evaluation costs in the budget that exceeds \$750 per day as long as sufficient justification is provided in the narrative for the higher cost.
- D11) What is the difference between a member living allowance and an employee salary/wage if both require FICA and tax payments?
CV Response: Both the employee salary/wage and the living allowance are paid by the grantee using federal grant funds, matching funds, or a combination of both. Unlike a wage, an AmeriCorps living allowance is paid in regular increments throughout the service term regardless of the number of hours served during a pay period.
- D12) Are the members on our payroll (with taxes and other deductions) or on CV/CNCS payroll?
CV Response: Grantees are responsible for distributing member living allowance on their payroll. The grantee must pay FICA for any member receiving a living allowance and must withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes from the member's living allowance. The grantee must also withhold Federal personal income taxes from member living allowances, requiring each member to complete a W-4 form at the beginning of the term of service and providing a W-2 form at the close of the tax year. The grantee must comply with any applicable state or local tax requirements. See Budget Narrative Instructions.
- D13) What is the impact on the living allowance for residential programs, or programs that provide housing?

CV Response: Residential programs, or programs that otherwise provide housing, should ensure that the living allowance that they are providing, in addition to the value of the housing, does not equal more than the maximum living allowance.

D14) Does the living allowance requirements differ between grant types?

CV Response: All grant types except Professional Corps are required to adhere to member living allowance requirements. Professional Corps members can earn a salary for their service, paid entirely by the organization with which the members serve, and are not included in the budget request.

D15) Do the Corporation Fixed Amount and CV Share come off the top of what is requested?

CV Response: The Corporation Fixed Amount is for indirect administrative costs the organization incurs in administering the program. The CNCS share may be used for indirect administrative costs without documentation supporting the allocation; the grantee share is match for the same. CV Share is the fixed amount that CV withholds for administration expenses.

D16) Where are descriptions included in the Budget Narrative?

CV Response: For items in the budget, include descriptions in the “Item” and “Purpose” columns for each line item. For the sources of match, include descriptions (including whether the match is “proposed” or “secured”) in the “Intended Purpose” column of the Sources and Types of Match Contributions table.

D17) Is there a maximum amount that can be requested for fixed-amount grants?

CV Response: There is no maximum amount that may be requested, so long as the application is proposing a cost per MSY that is less than or equal to the maximum for the grant type. The final grant award amount may vary from the request.

D18) If our organization offers background checks for free, do we need to budget the \$54 plus the cost of a state background check per member/staff?

CV Response: Yes. CNCS is requiring all applicants include in the budget \$54 plus the cost of a state background check.

E. Performance Measures/Logic Model

E1) Do the AmeriCorps members in my program have to be directly providing the service counted in California Performance Measurement Worksheets?

CV Response: The measures, including National Performance Measures, selected by an AmeriCorps program should reflect the expected result of the AmeriCorps program activities. The AmeriCorps members do not have to interact directly with the beneficiaries of the service, but they must provide direct support that makes the program’s results possible.

- E2) Do all members have to work on the exact same activities or can the activities differ slightly, if they are all working toward the same performance measure targets?
CV Response: As long as the activities in which the AmeriCorps members engage are consistent with your program’s Theory of Change and align with the performance measure instructions for the National Performance Measures you wish to use, the activities do not have to be exactly the same for all members.
- E3) Can I count AmeriCorps Members as beneficiaries of service if my program selects National Performance Measures?
CV Response: National Performance Measures are NOT designed to capture the impact the program may have on the AmeriCorps members. Programs may count AmeriCorps members as beneficiaries of the services if the members receive the services as a member of the general public (or target population) rather than as part of their AmeriCorps service or training.
- E4) Can I count the same people in more than one Performance Measure output?
CV Response: Unless otherwise specified, the same individuals may be counted more than once across different Measures for different services (interventions) they may be receiving. However, programs cannot count the same individual more than once within any one specific Performance Measure.
- E5) Am I allowed to allocate funds for collecting and analyzing data? If so, how much?
CV Response: Costs related to measuring the performance of a program are allowable grant expenses. There is no standard recommended amount. As with all cost reimbursement grants, these costs must be reasonable, allowable for the proposed program, and properly allocated across grant activities.
- E6) Should the Strengthening Communities and Member Development performance measures be included in the logic model?
CV Response: It is up to the applicant to determine if the Strengthening Communities and Member Development performance measures are activities that fit into their logic model. Keep in mind that the Logic Model may not exceed three pages.
- E7) Can two or more outputs have the same outcome?
CV Response: It depends on the program model; if the program model represents a continuum of care/services where participating leads from one level of service to another, then it makes sense to create an aligned measure of multiple outputs that lead to a single outcome. If there are two completely different interventions that lead to the same outcome, those should be reported with each output/outcome as their own aligned measure.
- E8) What is a “self-nominated” or “applicant-determined” performance measure?

CV Response: A self-nominated or applicant-determined performance measure is one in which the applicant identifies the outputs and/or outcomes that will be measured, based on its intervention. This is different from the National Performance Measures, where CNCS pre-determines common outputs and, in some instances, outcomes with specific definitions and data collection methods that applicants must use. In any case, performance measure targets are determined by the applicant.

E9) Are National Performance Measures required?

CV Response: The use of National Performance Measures is not required.

E10) How do I decide if my program should select National Performance Measures?

CV Response: If the National Performance Measures align with your program's activities, then CV strongly their selection. The *National Performance Measures Instructions* provide definitions, requirements, and guidelines that will help you determine which are right for you. These instructions can be found on the RFA webpage.

E11) What are the reporting requirements if I am using National Performance Measures?

CV Response: Performance reporting requirements are the same for all grantees, regardless of performance measures.

E12) Does the "MSY Allocation per Performance Measure" table on the PMW Cover Sheet need to account for all performance measures?

CV Response: The "MSY Allocation per Performance Measure" table only needs to account for the Needs & Service PMWs. The Common Member Development and Strengthening Communities measures are not included.

E13) The criteria for section B2: Theory of Change states that "all elements of the logic model are aligned with the program's theory of change, performance measures, and program narrative." Should we include our logic model in this section of the narrative, or will it be scored on the separate logic model document alone?

CV Response: The theory of change section should be clearly articulated in the Program Narrative. The Logic Model is a separate, visual representation of the theory of change. The application will be scored based primarily on the Narrative, but the Logic Model and its alignment with what is described in the Narrative will be a factor in scoring. The Performance Measurement Worksheets should also align with the theory of change articulated in the Narrative and Logic Model.

E14) Where in the CNCS National Performance Measures Instructions can we find the data collection requirements referenced in Row 7: Instruments of the Performance Measurement Worksheets?

CV Response: This information can be found in the "How to Calculate/Measure/Collect Data" row for each National Performance Measure in the Instructions document.

- E15) If our program will have more than one focus area, do we need to have separate PMWs for each focus area?
CV Response: If members are providing distinct interventions in different focus areas, you would need to include a separate PMW to cover those needs and services.
- E16) In the Common Strengthening Communities PMW, are we supposed to describe the volunteer activities or the member activities in recruiting volunteers?
CV Response: Describe the activities that member will engage in to recruit volunteers. The Need for this PMW is the need for volunteers that members will meet through their recruitment activities.
- E17) Is there a maximum amount of member hours that can be dedicated to the Common Strengthening Communities PMW?
CV Response: There is no limit to the amount of time members may spend on volunteer recruitment as long as the activities are consistent with the program's overall design and theory of change. Hours that seem excessive given the program described in the application may be clarified by reviewers.
- E18) Are there minimum targets for volunteer recruitment that CV expects applicants to reach?
CV Response: No, the targets for the Common Strengthening Communities PMW and the Common Member Development PMW are determined by the program. The only requirement is that they be reasonable and achievable given the proposed program's design.