



LOUISIANA SERVE COMMISSION

FY10 AmeriCorps*State Application Packet

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Deadline
November 13, 2009**



The Louisiana Serve Commission utilizes a strictly competitive process for reviewing and funding all applications submitted by the established due dates and adhering to published guidelines. Louisiana Serve Commission staff can only provide guidance to prospective applicants. Additionally, Louisiana Serve Commission staff does not issue any endorsements or support for individual applications, program designs, and/or performance measures. In applying for funding from Louisiana Serve Commission, please follow all directions precisely and respond to each application prompt in the manner that best represents your agency/organization and program design.

APPLICATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

1. How are AmeriCorps programs funded?

The Louisiana Serve Commission receives funds from the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#). We award these funds to local nonprofits and governmental organizations through a competitive grant process. Generally, in the fall, the Louisiana Serve Commission announces funding availability for AmeriCorps grants. All current Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are posted on www.volunteerlouisiana.gov.

2. Will the Louisiana Serve Commission provide an organization with assistance in completing their application?

Unfortunately, we cannot provide any type of extensive one-on-one assistance. By law, we have to ensure that every applicant gets a fair chance to obtain the limited funding available. This is why we will provide technical assistance webinars on Thursday, October 15, 2009 @ 10am and Tuesday, October 27, 2009 @ 1pm (see INSTRUCTIONS for additional information), and are providing these Frequently Asked Questions.

3. If I have additional questions or need further assistance, how should I contact the Louisiana Serve Commission?

Applicants may always contact the Louisiana Serve Commission by calling (225) 342-2038. However, the primary contact for applicants during the application process is Stephanie Trahan, AmeriCorps Program Officer/Program Development & Training Coordinator. You may contact Stephanie Trahan at (225) 342-3333 or strahan@crt.state.la.us

PLEASE NOTE: To ensure compliance with Louisiana law and the fairness of this competitive funding process, we kindly request that all questions related to planning, developing, or submitting an application be submitted via email. Following this guideline allows us to share each question and answer with all interested parties, via this FAQ document (which will be updated regularly); thereby preventing any organization from acquiring an unintended competitive advantage.

4. Once you have started inputting information into the eGrants system, are you allowed to exit and complete at a later time?

Yes, you have the option to save your information once you have established an eGrants account and begin submitting your information. It is strongly recommended that you type your grant in a Word document and cut and paste into eGrants.

5. Can you cut and paste from Word into eGrants?

Yes, in fact it is highly recommended that you prepare your grant in Word, then cut and paste into eGrants to make sure you have not exceeded your 71,000 character limitation. eGrants includes a verification process prior to submitting your grant to us so you will not be able to submit your grant to

the Louisiana Serve Commission if it exceeds the 71,000 character limitations which includes spaces and punctuation.

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

6. How long has the Louisiana Serve Commission been in existence?

Created in 1993, the Louisiana Serve Commission began awarding projects in 1994. We invite you to learn more about us at www.volunteerlouisiana.gov.

7. Is there a limit on the number of issue/service categories I can identify as the focus for my prospective program and/or address within my application?

No, but the Louisiana Serve Commission has found that the most successful programs are those that have concentrated fully on only one primary focus area.

8. How many new applications are you expecting?

The Louisiana Serve Commission typically receives approximately 3-7 new applications each funding cycle.

9. What is the average number of members per corps and the average size (in funds awarded) of programs in Louisiana?

*Louisiana's AmeriCorps*State programs currently have corps ranging from 5 to 146 members, with the average corps containing 15-25 members. However, the exact number of members in a particular corps is always based on each program's specific needs combined with a reasonable assessment of how many members may be required to get the job done. Individual funding levels are derived from the number and types of members a program is awarded and may not exceed \$13,000 per MSY (Member Service Year), which is the equivalent of one full-time member. Please note that applicants must propose a corps size of at a least the equivalent of 5 MSYs to be eligible for funding consideration.*

10. In the past, what has been the difference between those new proposals that are funded and those that are not funded?

Challenges common to unsuccessful applicants include failing to follow the application instructions, document a compelling need to be addressed by the program, outline a sound plan to manage and support members, sufficiently document community and partner support, and adequately communicate how the proposed program fits within the mission of the organization.

11. What is eGrants and how does it work?

*eGrants is the web-based grant application and administration system implemented by the Corporation for National and Community Service in compliance with the Paper Reduction Act. Instructions for entering applications via eGrants are included in the downloadable file titled, "**FY10 AMC State Application Packet INSTRUCTIONS**" which is currently available on our website at www.volunteerlouisiana.gov.*

12. What if I want to operate a program model in two geographic locations within Louisiana? What about operating in two geographic locations in two different states?

This is called a multi-site model, and will fit within the guidelines for FY10 AMC State Application Packet INSTRUCTIONS. Please identify your desire to operate a multi-site model in Louisiana within your Program Narrative at all appropriate places where that information is requested. This includes number of members/MSYs, locations, etc....

If you are interested in proposing a program to be operated across multiple STATES, this is a National Direct model. These applications should be submitted directly to the Corporation for National & Community Service via eGrants @ www.americorps.org/egrants .

Prior to submission of a grant application to the Corporation, an applicant proposing to operate a program in two or more states is expected to consult with the State Commission of the state in which it intends to operate. Such an applicant must include in its application a description of the manner and extent to which the organization consulted with the State Commission in each state where the applicant intends to operate and the nature of the consultation. The Corporation will solicit the views of State Commissions regarding applications received for programs operating in their states.

PROGRAM DESIGN:

13. Where does the Louisiana Serve Commission recommend that a organization should start?

Focus on establishing the following:

- *A compelling “statement of need” that will clearly convey the local need you have identified and which can be successfully documented.*
- *Expected outcomes that are directly related to the stated need and realistically measurable.*
- *A program design that clearly addresses the identified needs and provides adequate training and support for the AmeriCorps Members.*
- *Also, focus on ensuring that included within your program design there are as many of the priorities listed in the provided application guidance as possible, and that each priority included is specifically described somewhere in the application narrative.*

From there, an applicant should determine the number and type of members needed, then began to formulate a budget.

14. How long does it take to write the grant?

The time frame will vary based upon what components of grant development are completed. There may be a need to meet and secure partnerships or conduct research on community needs before finalizing the grant. It is recommended that at least 1-2 weeks is dedicated to writing and finalizing the grant, with the time burden to complete the actual packet at approximately 40 hours.

15. Are there limitations or guidelines regarding when a specific AmeriCorps program can begin?

AmeriCorps programs administered by the Louisiana Serve Commission have two options regarding “start dates.” Successful applicants should plan to begin their program on either: September 1, 2010 or November 1, 2010.

16. Can we contact you for feedback if we have an idea for a specific program design?

All funding decisions are made by citizen reviewers, our Commissioners and the Corporation for National and Community Service. As such, although you can submit information about your idea to us at strahan@crt.state.la.us, we will not be able to provide any insight into whether or not a particular program design is fundable or would even be considered competitively strong. Consequently, we STRONGLY recommend that you contact currently active programs with a similar program design.

A list of Louisiana's currently operational programs is available on our website and additional programs, from around the nation, are identified on the Corporation for National and Community Service website (www.nationalservice.org). In addition, if you have difficulty locating a similar program, we would be happy to assist your organization in obtaining the contact information of programs we would consider to be appropriate (keeping in mind, of course, that none of the Louisiana Serve Commission staff providing this information make any of the funding decisions).

MEMBER ISSUES AND BENEFITS:

17. As a first time applicant, is there a minimum or maximum limit to the number of members I may request, or other similar restrictions?

Yes, there is a limit to the number of AmeriCorps members that an organization may request on their application. In order to be eligible for funding, an applicant must submit a request for NO LESS THAN the equivalent of 5 MSYs. Additionally, for the remaining years of a three year grant period programs are not held to the number of members requested their first year; generally, programs are allowed to request an increase in the number of members after a successful first year.

18. Is there a minimum living allowance amount required for less than full-time members?

There is no requirement to pay a minimum living allowance for less than full-time members. However it is recommended that a living allowance be provided to support members and increase the likelihood that members will successfully complete the program.

19. What are the qualifications of AmeriCorps members and is retention of members a concern?

The basic requirements for an AmeriCorps Member is that they must be at least 17 years old, be an U.S. Citizen, possess a high school diploma or agree to complete GED requirements during the year of service. If the Member is serving a vulnerable population, then a cleared background check is also required.

The basic requirements are somewhat generalized for AmeriCorps members to allow each organization to establish their own criteria for their members. As a member's service activities drive each organization's particular minimum qualification requirements, they should be considered when initially developing recruitment plans. This type of analysis would be an excellent dialogue to have with those developing the program and potential partners. In general, the recruitment and retention of members can become a challenge. However, effective planning and support for members should alleviate many of the challenges.

20. Who is responsible for providing health insurance for the members?

The lead agency or the organization receiving the AmeriCorps grant funds is responsible for providing insurance to all full-time AmeriCorps members. The lead agency may choose to provide this coverage through an existing plan or work with one of the national AmeriCorps providers for

healthcare. The Louisiana Serve Commission can provide contact information for national healthcare providers.

21. What is the childcare eligibility criterion? Is it income based?

Childcare eligibility is income based and in accordance with the Childcare and Development Block Grant Act of 1990. Member eligibility is based on need and total family income of members must be less than 75% of the state median income. Members must reside with and be a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 13.

BUDGETS AND OTHER FISCAL REQUIREMENTS:

22. How much money can I get to operate an AmeriCorps Program?

The funding is based on how many "Member Service Years" (MSYs) you request. The limit is \$13,000 per MSY. Most of the funding will go to support the benefits of AmeriCorps members. For example, for ten full-time members, you may receive up to \$130,000, of which approximately \$118,000 will go toward member support and benefits.

23. Is there a match requirement?

Yes, AmeriCorps program operational funding has an over all minimum match requirement of 24%, with the overall grantee share of total program costs increasing gradually beginning in Year 4, to a maximum of 50% by the 10th year of funding.

These matching funds may be federal (if the other grantor agency gives approval) or non-federal, cash or in-kind.

24. What types of expenditures are considered unallowable as budget items?

Please refer to the OMB Circular (Cost Principles), which corresponds to your organization type, the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (as codified within the CFRs), the guidelines under CFDA 94.006, the AmeriCorps Regulations, and the current year's AmeriCorps Provisions for guidelines and rules concerning the various types of unallowable expenditures. These documents (or links to them) can be accessed through the CNCS website at http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp.

25. Can you use AmeriCorps funds to hire staff and for other operational costs?

These would be considered allowable expenditures IF the costs incurred are in accordance with your approved budget. The maximum total amount of federal grant funds that can be requested is limited to \$13,000 per each MSY (equivalent to one full time AmeriCorps member) requested, and the minimum living allowance for a full time member is currently \$11,800. Consequently, as the majority of the federal funds award provided to your organization will go to support your members, most organizations are dismayed to discover that AmeriCorps grants provide significantly less operational costs than they had originally anticipated.

26. Am I required to have a Program Director? If so, what amount should I budget for the Program Director's salary?

If a program is requesting more than 10 members, Louisiana Serve Commission will typically require the organization to have a Program Director position. This person could already work for the

organization and their duties could also be split between more than one person, as long as in total the organization makes provisions for at least the equivalent of 1 FTE. The Program Director's salary is solely determined by your organization.

27. Is it necessary to identify the source(s) of our match in the budget narrative?

Yes. When your application is being reviewed by a reviewer, it is imperative that your partner organization(s) and what they will contribute is clearly identified within the budget narrative.

28. Is it necessary to have commitments from partners prior to the proposal date?

At no time should a contract be executed without having the partners in place. While ideally you should have partners committed to the program prior to requesting funding, it is understood that these partnerships take time and may take confirmed funding to receive commitment. Reviewers and Commission staff will be looking for continuity of partners and the engagement of new partners in the application and during the program year. Remember, establishing and increasing partnerships is a critical aspect of achieving sustainability.

29. How important is it to meet budgeted match requirements on a per line item basis vs. an overall average compliance?

For the section relating to Member Costs (Section II), the match is primarily by line item since most costs are based on the living allowance. The percentage match for FICA and WC should be in accordance with the percentage of living allowance match. Health care has a limit (85% federal and 15% cash match). For the remaining sections (1 and 3) we track jointly. The match does not have to be in accordance with line items, but in accordance with the overall sections monitored.

30. I have two (2) different documents describing provisions for AmeriCorps proposals. One says that administrative costs are limited to 5%, and the other says administrative costs are limited to 4%. Is this because one is document is published by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the other is published by the Louisiana Serve Commission? Which one should I use?

Yes, one is from the Corporation for National and Community Service and one is from the Louisiana Serve Commission. You should use the guidance and application forms from the Louisiana Serve Commission. The variation in allowable administrative costs is due to the Louisiana Serve Commission claiming a 1.05% fee for the management of subgrantees. The 4.21% allowed to AmeriCorps programs for administrative costs, plus the 1.05% fiscal agent fee equals the 5.26% limitation set by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

ONCE AWARDED:

31. How does an AmeriCorps program operate locally?

Once awarded funding, a local organization recruits AmeriCorps members from its local community and trains them to carry out the identified service of the organization. The organization has the autonomy to operate the program according to its mission and goal, all within the compliance guidelines of the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Louisiana Serve Commission.

32. What if I begin incurring expenses after verbal notification of my award, but before I receive my official grant award letter?

Sub grantees may be reimbursed for pre-award costs only if they are incurred with the written approval of the Louisiana Serve Commission and the Corporation's Office of Grants Management. You incur all pre-award costs at your own risk. Neither the Louisiana Serve Commission nor the Corporation or is under obligation to reimburse you for these costs if you do not receive advance approval, or if the approved amount is less than anticipated. To request such approval, send an email request to the LSC AmeriCorps Program Officer, with a copy that includes a brief justification for the costs to be incurred and indicates the desired effective date. If your request is approved, the Office of Grants Management will issue a letter authorizing the pre-award costs within five business days. The Corporation will consider approving, where appropriate, the following types of pre-award costs:

- *Personnel expenses and benefits.*
- *Travel for staff and prospective members.*
- *Equipment.*
- *Supplies.*
- *Contractual and consultant services.*
- *Training for staff and prospective members.*
- *Evaluation.*
- *Other program operating costs.*

Because the Strengthen AmeriCorps Program Act (P.L. 108-45 (July 3, 2003), codified at 42 U.S.C. 12605) specifically provides that a national service position is approved when the Corporation issues a grant award, we cannot approve member living allowances or support costs, including FICA, workers' compensation, health care, and child care, as pre-award costs. Approval of pre-award costs does not authorize you or your subgrantee to enroll AmeriCorps members or have them begin serving. AmeriCorps members may not count any hours served prior to the award being issued as part of their term of service.

33. Why do you do Site Visits?

To fulfill various compliance requirements related to administering these federal funds, we conduct site visits to see if the program is progressing toward meeting its objectives, to identify any technical assistance a program may be in need of and to better determine whether the Louisiana Serve Commission can provide this technical assistance, or facilitate its provision, to your program.

34. What is the AmeriCorps Pre-Award Risk Assessment and how do I know whether I must complete one for my organization?

The AmeriCorps Pre-Award Risk Assessment is an intensive tool, meant to be completed by an executive or fiscal level officer of a lead agency, which consists of multiple sets of successive "yes/no" (for the most part) type questions that cover the various systems, policies, and procedures usually inherent in an organization capable of demonstrating successful federal grant management. This comprehensive questionnaire has proven to be an effective tool for the Louisiana Serve Commission in the preemptive identification of any technical assistance needs required by an organization to ensure they have the level of capacity needed to manage an AmeriCorps program adequately. All new and recompetete applicants are required to complete an AmeriCorps Pre-Award Risk Assessment as part of their application process. Additionally, at various intervals, current grantees must update their previously submitted information. When an organization is required to submit the AmeriCorps Pre-Award Risk Assessment, the questionnaire must be completed BEFORE we will submit an application to CNCS for funding.

35. Is there a pool of potential members waiting to be placed?

There are various resources available to assist an organization in member recruitment; however, ultimately it is the responsibility of each organization to actively recruit members for its program.

36. What is the turn around time for reimbursements?

An organization's reimbursement will usually be made before the end of the month in which the reimbursement is requested, via submission of the Periodic Expenses Report (PER), IF the PER and all of the accompanying reports, as required, was accurately submitted by the 10th of the month following the month the expenditures were made. PERs submitted after the 10th of a particular month will not usually be processed until the following month.

For example: An organization makes expenditures during August 2008, and reports these expenditures by submitting, with any required supplementary reports, an accurate, and complete PER on September 10, 2008. The organization can expect the reimbursement for their August expenses to be made prior to the last working day in September. However, if the organization submits the above PER on September 22, 2008, then they should expect the reimbursement of their August expenses to be made anytime before the last working day in October.

Due to inherent variations in the time required to process a particular reimbursement request, the Louisiana Serve Commission requires each successful applicant to maintain at least 60 days of operating capital on behalf of the AmeriCorps program for which they are applying.

PLEASE CHECK BACK FREQUENTLY @ www.volunteerlouisiana.gov FOR UPDATES AND ADDITIONS TO THESE FAQs