

Application Instructions: AmeriCorps*State Planning Grant

Deadline for Submission: June 25, 2014

Submitting Your Application in eGrants

Use these instructions in conjunction with the *Notice of Funds Available* or *Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (Notice)* for the year in which you are applying, and the AmeriCorps Regulations, 45 CFR §§ 2520–2550. **The Notice includes deadlines, eligibility requirements, submission requirements, and other information that changes year-to-year for all AmeriCorps grant programs.**

If there is any inconsistency between the AmeriCorps regulations, the *Notice*, and the Application Instructions, the order of precedence is as follows:

1. AmeriCorps regulations 45 CFR §§ 2520–2550 take precedence over the
2. *Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity*, which takes precedence over the
3. Application Instructions.

Applicants need to establish an eGrants account by accessing this link:

<https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp> and selecting “Don’t have an eGrants account?

Create an account.”

Your application consists of the following components. Please make sure to complete each section.

- I. Applicant Info
- II. Application Info
- III. Narratives
- IV. Performance Measures
- V. Documents
- VI. Budget
- VI. Review, Authorize, and Submit
- VIII. Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants (Optional)

In eGrants, before Starting Section I, you will need to:

- Start a new Grant Application
- Select a Program Area (AmeriCorps)
- Select the appropriate eGrants NOFA:
Commission AmeriCorps State FY 2014

I. Applicant Info

In eGrants, complete the Applicant Info Section (Attachment B). This section is particularly important for data collection and evaluation. Please take the time to reflect your proposed program activities accurately in this section.

- In the Program Info Section enter “New.”
- Enter your contact information into the fields that appear.
- Select a primary Program Model and a secondary Program Model, if appropriate.
- Then select characteristics that fit your project under Program Design, Program Location, and Program Focus. Enter or select a Program Director and Program Website URL.

II. Application Info

Information entered in the Applicant Info, Application Info, and Budget sections will populate the SF 424 Facesheet.

In the Application Info Section enter:

- Areas affected by your proposed program.
- Requested project period start and end dates. Start date will be September 1, 2014. End date will be February 28, 2015.
- If you are delinquent on any federal debt.
- State Application Identifier: Enter N/A.
- State Single Point of Contact: This is pre-filled as “No, this is not applicable.”
- For “Project Director” please enter the Executive Director or other authorizing executive who will certify the grant.
- Leave the box for “Program Initiative” blank.
- The “Estimated Funds Requested” box will be populated automatically after you complete the budget.

III. Narratives

The narrative section of the application is your opportunity to convince reviewers that your project meets the selection criteria. Below are some general recommendations to help you present your project in a way the reviewers will find compelling and persuasive.

- **Lead from your program strengths and be explicit.** Do not make the mistake of trying to stretch your proposed program description to fit each funding priority and special consideration articulated in the regulations or the *Notice*.
- **Be clear and succinct.** Reviewers are not interested in jargon, boilerplate, rhetoric, or exaggeration. They are interested in learning precisely what you intend to do, and how your project responds to the selection criteria presented below.
- **Avoid circular reasoning.** The problem you plan to solve should not be described as the lack of the program you are proposing.
- **Explain how.** Avoid simply stating that the criteria will be met. Explicitly describe how the proposed project will meet the criteria.
- **Don't make assumptions.** Even if you have received funding from the Corporation

in the past, do not assume your reviewers know anything about you, your proposed program, your partners, or your beneficiaries. Avoid overuse of acronyms.

- **Use an impartial proofreader.** Before you submit your application, let someone who is completely unfamiliar with your project read and critique the project narrative.
- **Follow the instructions and discuss each criterion in the order they are presented in the instructions.**

In eGrants, you will enter text for

- Executive Summary: A brief paragraph is provided
- Program Design.
- Organizational Capability.
- Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy.

You may not exceed 30,000 characters, or about 15 double spaced pages, including the Executive Summary. The character count includes spaces and punctuation. Reviewers will not consider material submitted over the character limits. Planning grants are typically shorter than this standard-usually averaging 15,000 characters.

Please note that the Narratives Section also includes fields for Clarification Information, Amendment Justification, and Continuation Changes. **These are not required fields. They will be used to enter information for clarification following review, request amendments once a grant is awarded, and enter changes in the narrative in continuation requests. Please enter N/A in these fields.**

A. Executive Summary

Please provide a one-paragraph summary of your proposed program. This paragraph must be 500 characters maximum, including spaces and punctuation.

The [Name of the organization] requests a planning grant to strengthen a program design whereby AmeriCorps members will [BRIEFLY describe your program concept]. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of [Focus Area(s)] and will be deployed in [identify the location (city, community, region)]. The CNCS investment of \$[amount of request] will be matched with \$[amount of projected match], \$[amount of local, state, and federal funds] in public funding and \$[amount of non-governmental funds] in private funding.

B. Program Design

Describe why you are applying for a planning grant and what you hope to achieve during the 6 month planning period. Include the problem you plan to solve with your AmeriCorps program and documentation of the need (extent/severity of the need in the community). Describe what AmeriCorps members will be doing to meet the need (intervention/activity), and the target communities you will serve. Provide a detailed description of your planning process and a timeline for planning activities.

Describe how you will use the planning period to develop your capacity to effectively manage an AmeriCorps program including but not limited to:

- Establishing systems and processes for sound programmatic and fiscal oversight.
- Creating a process for selecting operating and service sites (if applicable) that will ensure the most appropriate and capable organizations are selected.
- Planning orientation and training for operating and service sites (if applicable).
- Planning orientation and training for AmeriCorps members.
- Ensuring you have the ability to provide or secure effective technical assistance (if applicable).

C. Organizational Capability

Identify the primary and secondary contacts for the grant application. Describe your organization's prior experience administering federal funds. Describe your ability to successfully plan an AmeriCorps program.

Unless your organization is brand new, describe your record of accomplishment. Discuss your prior experience in the proposed area of programming and other examples of your organization's leadership in the community. Describe your organization's management and staff structure and the role the board of directors, administrators, and staff will play in the planning process.

Special Circumstances

In applying the organizational capability criteria to each proposal, reviewers may also take into account the following circumstances of individual organizations:

- The age of your organization and its rate of growth.
- Whether your organization serves a resource-poor community, such as a rural or remote community, a community with a high poverty rate, or a community with a scarcity of philanthropic and corporate resources.

If you feel that any of the circumstances stated above have an impact on your organizational capability that has not already been discussed, please describe the circumstance and how it affects your organizational capacity.

D. Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

Describe your plans to develop a cost-effective program including how you will develop diverse resources that will support your program implementation and sustainability. Discuss the adequacy of your budget to support the planning process including your match. Describe how you will secure any additional commitments you need for the planning grant.

In applying the cost-effectiveness criteria, Volunteer Louisiana will take into account the following circumstances of individual programs: program age, or the extent to which your program brings

on new sites; whether your program or project is located in a resource-poor community, such as a rural or remote community, a community with a high poverty rate, or a community with a scarcity of corporate or philanthropic resources; whether your program or project is located in a high-cost, economically distressed community, measured by applying appropriate Federal and State data; and whether the reasonable and necessary costs of your program or project are higher because they are associated with engaging or serving difficult-to-reach populations, or achieving greater program impact as evidenced through performance measures and program evaluation.

E. Evaluation Summary or Plan Enter N/A. Evaluations and evaluation plans are not required for planning grants.

F. Amendment Justification

Enter N/A. This field will be used if you are awarded a grant and need to amend it.

G. Clarification Information

Enter N/A. This field will be used to enter information that requires clarification in the post-review period.

H. Continuation Update

Enter N/A for Planning Grants.

IV. Performance Measures

AmeriCorps Performance Measures

One performance measure is required of Planning Grants, as outlined below.

Home Page

To start the module, click the “Begin” button on the Home Page.

As you proceed through the module, the Home Page will summarize your work and provide links to edit the parts of the module you have completed. You may also navigate sections of the module using the tab feature at the top of each page.

Once you have started the module, clicking “Continue Working” will return you to the tab you were on when you last closed the module.

To edit the interventions, objectives, MSYs, and slot allocations for your application, click the “Edit Objectives/MSYs/Slots” button.

After you have created at least one aligned performance measure, the Home Page will display a chart summarizing your measures. To edit a performance measure, click the “Edit” button. To delete a measure, click “Delete.” To create a new performance measure, click the “Add New Performance Measure” button.

Objectives Tab

An expandable list of CNCS focus areas appears on this tab. When you click on a focus area, a list of objectives from the CNCS strategic plan appears. A list of common interventions appears under each objective.

First click on a focus area. Then click on an objective and select all interventions that are part of your program design. Interventions are the activities that members and volunteers will carry out to address the problem(s) identified in the application. **Applicant will select “other” because your application is not requesting funding for members/direct service.** Repeat these actions for each of your program’s focus areas.

Choose your program’s primary focus area from the drop-down list. Only the focus areas that correspond to the objectives you selected above appear in the list. Next, select the primary intervention within your primary focus area. You will be required to create an aligned performance measure that contains your primary intervention.

MSYs/Slots Tab

On this tab, you will enter information about the allocation of MSYs and slots across the focus areas and objectives you have selected. Although planning grants do not include MSYs, please enter 1 minimum-time MSY at 3% in order to submit in eGrants. This is a system requirement and has no bearing on your grant requirements.

Performance Measure Tab

This tab allows you to create sets of aligned performance measures for all the grant activities you intend to measure. You must create at least one aligned performance measure that includes your primary intervention.

To create an aligned performance measure, begin by selecting an objective. The list of objectives includes those you selected on the objectives tab.

Title: Give this performance measure the title “Planning Grant Measure”, and enter it in the text box.

Problem: Briefly describe the problem your program will address in this performance measure.

Intervention: Because you selected “other” as an intervention and wish to include an applicant-determined intervention in your aligned performance measure, click “add user intervention” and enter “Plan an AmeriCorps program and gain capacity to apply successfully for an AmeriCorps operational grant”.

Output: Create an applicant-determined output by clicking “Add User Output.”

Outcome: Create an applicant-determined outcome by clicking “Add User Outcome.”

Enter the number of MSYs and slots your program will allocate to achieving the outcomes you have selected in this performance measure. This will be .03 MSY/1 MT slot.

Click “next” to proceed to the data collection tab.

Data Collection Tab

For each of the following components, please enter N/A:

- Design and dosage (frequency, intensity, duration)
- Expand each output and outcome and enter data collection information.
- Instruments of data collection

For applicant-determined outputs and outcomes, enter the unit of measure for your target. This will be **ZERO (0)**.

After entering data collection information for all outputs and outcomes, click “Mark Complete.”

Summary Tab

The summary tab shows all of the information you have entered in the module.

To print a summary of all performance measures, click “Print PDF for all Performance Measures.”

To print one performance measure, expand the measure and click “Print This Measure.”

Click “Edit Performance Measure” to return to the Performance Measure tab.

Click “Edit Data Collection” to return to the Data Collection tab.

“Click Validate Performance Measures” to validate this module prior to submitting your application.

V. Budget Instructions for Planning Grant Applicants

A. Overview of Key Budget Requirements

Program requirements, including requirements on match are located in the AmeriCorps regulations, modified by appropriations language, and summarized below. Administrative costs must not exceed 5% of the total Corporation funds requested.

- You must match with cash or in-kind contributions at least 24% of the project’s total budget.
- The acceptable sources of matching funds are federal, state, local, private sector, and/or other funds in accordance with applicable AmeriCorps requirements.
- Identify the source and total dollar amount of cash match from private, state and local and federal funds, the source type, and total amounts of in-kind support. Define all acronyms the first time they are used.

Note: The Corporation’s legislation permits the use of non-Corporation federal funds as match for the grantee share of the budget. Please discuss your intention of using federal funds to match an AmeriCorps grant with the other agency prior to submitting your application. Section 121(e)(5) of the National Community Service Act requires that grantees that use other federal funds as match for an AmeriCorps grant report the amount and source of these funds to the Corporation. The Federal Financial Report (FFR) will be used to collect the federal match data. If a grantee uses federal funds as match, they will be required to report the sources and amounts on the FFR.

B. Preparing Your Budget

Your proposed budget should be sufficient to allow you to perform the tasks described in your narrative. Reviewers will consider the information you provide in this section in their assessment of the Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy selection criterion.

Follow the detailed budget instructions below to prepare your budget.

eGrants will create the budget and the budget narrative automatically from the detailed budget information you enter. Once you have entered your budget information in eGrants you will be asked to validate your budget and eGrants will check your submission for errors.

As you prepare your budget:

- All the amounts you request must be defined for a particular purpose. Do not include miscellaneous, contingency, or other undefined budget amounts.
- Your detailed budget narrative must provide an itemized explanation of proposed costs, including their purpose.
- Present the basis for all calculations in the form of an equation.
- Do not include unallowable expenses, e.g., entertainment costs (which include food and beverage costs) unless they are justified as an essential component of an activity.
- Do not include fractional amounts (cents).

C. Detailed Budget Instructions

Please keep in mind that any proposed expenses can only relate to the planning and preparation for an AmeriCorps program/proposal. Allowable costs could include:

Section I. Program Operating Costs

Complete Section I, Program Operating Costs, of the Budget Worksheet by entering the “Total Amount,” “CNCS Share,” and “Grantee Share” for Parts A-I, as follows:

A. Personnel Expenses

Under “Position/Title Description,” list each staff position separately and provide salary and percentage of effort devoted to this award. Each staff person’s role listed in the budget must be described in the application narrative and each staff person mentioned in the narrative must be listed in the budget. Because the purpose of this grant is to enable and stimulate volunteer community service, do not include the value of direct community service performed by volunteers. However, you may include the value of volunteer services contributed to the organization for organizational functions such as accounting, audit work, or training of staff.

B. Personnel Fringe Benefits

Under “Purpose/Description,” identify the types of fringe benefits to be covered and the costs of benefit(s) for each staff position. Allowable fringe benefits typically include FICA, Worker’s Compensation, Retirement, SUTA, Health and Life Insurance, IRA, and 401K. You may provide a calculation for total benefits as a percentage of the salaries to which they apply or list each benefit as a separate item. If a fringe benefit amount is over 30%, please list separately.

Holidays, leave, and other similar vacation benefits are not included in the fringe benefit rates but are absorbed into the personnel expenses (salary) budget line item. Uncommon or exceptionally high-cost benefits should be itemized and justified.

C. 1. Staff Travel

Describe the purpose for which program staff members will travel. Provide a calculation that includes itemized costs for airfare, transportation, lodging, per diem, and other travel-related expenses multiplied by the number of trips/staff. Where applicable, identify the current standard reimbursement rate(s) of the organization for mileage, daily per diem, and similar supporting information. The standard mileage reimbursement should not exceed the federal mileage rate unless a result of applicant policy and justified in budget narrative. Only domestic travel is allowable.

For example: two staff members will attend the National Conference on Service and Volunteering.

2 staff X \$750 airfare + \$50 ground transportation + \$400 lodging + \$35 per diem = \$2,470 for national conference.

C. 2. Member Travel

N/A.

D. Equipment

N/A.

E. Supplies

Include the amount of funds to purchase consumable supplies and materials that cost under \$5,000 per unit. Items over \$5,000 are considered equipment and are not allowed as a budget cost for planning grants. You must individually list any single item costing \$1,000 or more.

F. Contractual and Consultant Services

Include costs for consultants related to the project's operations, except training consultants, who will be listed in Sections G., below. Payments to individuals for consultant services under this grant may not exceed \$750 per day (excluding costs for indirect expenses, travel, supplies, etc.). The \$750 daily rate is a ceiling, and we anticipate budgeted daily rates at considerably lower levels. Indicate the daily rate, number of days, and total cost for consultants you are proposing to use and their contractual services.

G. 1. Staff Training

Include the costs associated with training staff on project requirements and training to enhance the skills needed for effective project implementation, i.e., project or financial management, team building, etc. If using a consultant(s) for training, indicate the estimated daily rate, not to exceed the maximum daily rate limit of \$750.

G. 2. Member Training

N/A.

H. Evaluation

N/A.

I. Other Program Operating Costs

Allowable costs in this budget category should include when applicable:

- Criminal history background checks for any employees or other individuals who receive a salary, education award, living allowance, or stipend or similar payment from the grant (federal or non-federal share).
- Office space rental for projects operating without an approved indirect cost rate agreement that covers office space. If space is budgeted and it is shared with other projects or activities, the costs must be equitably pro-rated and allocated between the activities or projects.
- Utilities, telephone, Internet and similar expenses that are specifically used for AmeriCorps project staff, and are not part of the organizations indirect cost/admin cost allocation pool. If such expenses are budgeted and shared with other projects or activities, the costs must be equitably pro-rated and allocated between the activities or projects.

Section II. Member Costs

All Member Costs are N/A.

Section III. Administrative/Indirect Costs

Definitions

Administrative costs are general or centralized expenses of the overall administration of an organization that receives Corporation funds and do not include particular project costs. These costs may include administrative staff positions. For organizations that have an established indirect cost rate for federal awards, administrative costs mean those costs that are included in the organization's indirect cost rate agreement. Such costs are generally identified with the organization's overall operation and are further described in Office of Management and Budget Circulars A-21, A-87, and A-122.

Options for Calculating Administrative/Indirect Costs (choose either A. OR B.) Applicants choose one of two methods to calculate allowable administrative costs – a Corporation-fixed percentage rate method or a federally approved indirect cost rate method.

Regardless of the option chosen, the Corporation's share of administrative costs is limited to 5% of the total Corporation funds **actually expended** under this grant.

A. Corporation Fixed Percentage Method

Five Percent Fixed Administrative Costs Option

The Corporation-fixed percentage rate method allows you to charge administrative costs up to a cap without a federally approved indirect cost rate and without documentation supporting the

allocation. If you choose the Corporation-fixed percentage rate method (Section IIIA in eGrants), you may charge, for administrative costs, a fixed 5.26% of the total of the Corporation funds expended. In order to charge this fixed 5.26%, the grantee match for administrative costs may not exceed 10% of all direct cost expenditures.

1. To determine the Corporation share for Section III: Multiply the sum of the Corporation funding shares of Sections I and II by 0.0526. This is the maximum amount you can request as Corporation share. The 5.26% maximum is calculated by multiplying the sum of the Corporation's share of Section I and Section II by the factor 0.0526. The factor 0.0526 is used to calculate the maximum amount of federal funds that may be budgeted for administrative (indirect) costs, rather than 0.0500, as a way to mathematically compensate for determining Section III costs when the total budget (Sections I + II + III) is not yet established. Enter this amount as the Corporation share for Section III A.
2. To determine the Grantee share for Section III: Then multiply the total (both Corporation and grantee share) of Sections I and II by 10% (0.10) and enter this amount as the grantee share for Section III A.

3. Enter the sum of the Corporation and grantee shares under Total Amount.

State Commission 1 percent Administration FEE.

As the Volunteer Louisiana requires a 1.05 percent fee, applicants must choose option A. for the documentation of the fee, even if they have a federally approved indirect cost rate. If applicable, the federally approved indirect cost rate may be budgeted under the Corporation Fixed Percentage (option B) not to exceed a reimbursement rate of 4.21 percent. To calculate these fractional shares, within Section III of the subgrant budget, one-fifth (20 percent) of the federal dollars budgeted for administrative costs is allocated to the commission's share and four-fifths (80 percent) of the federal dollars budgeted for administrative costs are allocated to the program's share. The allocation between commission and program shares would be calculated as follows:

$$4. ([\text{Section I}] + [\text{Section II}] \times 0.0526) \times (0.20) = \text{Commission Share } ([\text{Section I}] + [\text{Section II}] \times 0.0526) \times (0.80) = \text{Subgrantee Share}$$

B. Federally approved Indirect Cost Rate

If you have a federally approved indirect cost rate and choose to use it, the rate will constitute documentation of your administrative costs, including the 5% maximum payable by the Corporation. Specify the Cost Type for which your organization has current documentation on file, i.e., Provisional, Predetermined, Fixed, or Final indirect cost rate. Supply your approved IDC rate (percentage) and the base upon which this rate is calculated (direct salaries, salaries and fringe benefits, etc.). It is at your discretion whether or not to claim your entire IDC rate to calculate administrative costs. If you choose to claim a lower rate, please include this rate in the Rate Claimed field.

1. Determine the base amount of direct costs to which you will apply the IDC rate, including both the Corporation and Grantee shares, as prescribed by your established rate agreement (i.e., based on salaries and benefits, total direct costs, or other). Then multiply the appropriate direct

costs by the rate being claimed. This will determine the total amount of indirect costs allowable under the grant.

2. To determine the Corporation share: Multiply the sum of the Corporation funding share in Sections I and II by 0.0526. This is the maximum amount you can claim as the Corporation share of indirect costs.

3. To determine the Grantee share: Subtract the amount calculated in step b (the Corporation administrative share) from the amount calculated in step a (the Indirect Cost total). This is the amount the applicant can claim as grantee share for administrative costs.

Section IV. Match

Source of Match

In the "Source of Match" field that appears at the end of Budget Sections I, II, and III, enter a brief description of the Source of Match, the amount, the match classification (Cash, In-kind, or Not Available) and Match Source (State/Local, Federal, Private, Other or Not Available) **for your entire match**. Define any acronyms the first time they are used.

VII. Review, Authorize, and Submit

eGrants requires that you review and verify your entire application before submitting, by completing the following sections in eGrants:

- Review
- Authorize
- Assurances
- Certifications
- Verify
- Submit

Authorization, Assurances and Certifications

Read the Authorization, Assurances, and Certifications carefully (Attachment E). The person who authorizes the application must be the applicant's Authorized Representative or his/her designee and must have an active eGrants account to sign these documents electronically. An Authorized Representative is the person in your organization authorized to accept and commit funds on behalf of the organization. A copy of the governing body's authorization for this official representative to sign must be on file in the applicant's office.

Be sure to check your entire application to ensure that there are no errors before submitting it. eGrants will also generate a list of errors if there are sections that need to be corrected prior to submission when you verify the application. If someone else is acting in the role of the applicant's authorized representative, that person must log into his/her eGrants account and proceed with Authorize and Submit. After signing off on the Authorization, Assurances, and Certifications, his/her name will override any previous signatory that may appear and show on the application as the Authorized Representative.

Note: Anyone within your organization that will be entering information in the application at any point during application preparation and submission in the eGrants system must have their own eGrants account. Individuals may establish an eGrants account by accessing this link: <https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp> and selecting “Don’t have an eGrants account? Create an account.”