Questions posed during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 funding competitions
Answers updated to reflect current policies & procedures (September 2009)

AmeriCorps Request for Proposals

Technical Assistance: Questions Posed in Past Funding Cycles & Their Responses

GENERAL

1. How much funding is available?

There is no maximum amount of funds available since applications may be referred for either national Competitive or statewide Formula funding. A total of approximately $600,000 is available for Formula funding.

2. How many AmeriCorps members should our organization apply for?

This is an individual decision for each applicant based upon the needs to be addressed and the program model to meet these needs. As stated in the Request for Applications, ServeNebraska requests that the minimum number of AmeriCorps members requested be 3 FTE. These members can be in service at one organization or multiple partner organizations. The maximum number of AmeriCorps members to be awarded to each funded applicant depends upon available funds and the degree of competition for the funds available.

3. What are the funding priorities?

As stated in the Request for Applications (RFA), programs addressing unmet human, educational, public safety, homeland security and environmental needs will be considered. As also highlighted in the RFA, through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act the Corporation for National & Community Service and ServeNebraska, have identified the following priority areas:

- ***Education:*** Unmet educational needs within communities especially those that help children and youth achieve success in school and prevent them from dropping out before high school graduation.
- ***Healthy Futures:*** Unmet health needs within communities including access to health care, disease prevention and health promotion initiatives, and health literacy.
- ***Clean Energy/Environment:*** Unmet energy-efficiency and environmental needs within communities.
- ***Veterans:*** Unmet needs of veterans, members of the Armed Forces who are on active duty, and family members of deployed military personnel and engages veterans in service.
- ***Opportunity:*** Unmet needs relating to economic opportunity for economically disadvantaged individuals within communities including financial literacy, housing assistance, job training, and nutritional assistance.

It is vital to clearly and succinctly define the need to be addressed in the grant application narrative is imperative.

4. Should the application be submitted electronically or printed out and mailed/faxed?

The application should be submitted electronically via the Corporation for National & Community Service eGrants system as specified in the Request for Applications. Supporting materials should be submitted to the ServeNebraska as specified in the Request for Applications.

5. I am a current grantee – receiving funds via a Formula grant. I cannot renew my grant in eGrants. Explain please.

In eGrants, since your grant will be submitted under Competitive and your current grant is Formula, you should create a new grant for submission. Hopefully you have the contents of the 2009-2010 grant submission saved in Word and/or Excel documents which you can update and submit without needing to craft the proposal from scratch.

In reviewing the grant submission, ServeNebraska can recommend applications for Competitive funding or hold onto them for Formula consideration. Additionally, grants submitted for Competitive consideration -- but not funded Competitively -- can subsequently be considered for Formula funding along with the withheld applications.

6. If funding is awarded, once negotiations are completed, is the start date flexible or do you specify the starting date and ending date for AmeriCorps programming?

ServeNebraska aims to have programs begin on September 1, 2010, though we are open to negotiating this date with successful applicants.

7. If funding is awarded, is it appropriate to start the recruitment process for AmeriCorps members before the actual start date of the AmeriCorps program?

It is appropriate -- and wise -- to begin recruitment activities once notification of funding has been received so that the members are in place when the grant begins. Please note that no grant funds can be used for these activities before the effective date of the contract between the AmeriCorps program and ServeNebraska.

8. For our program, we are considering a plan for rolling enrollment -- some may enroll immediately after our AmeriCorps grant start date, if funded, while others may start weeks or even months later. Will we be required to have all our members complete their service term before the end of the program year, or will there be flexibility for those who started later to complete their hours later?

ServeNebraska prefers to have a uniform start date of September 1, 2010 for all 2010-2011 AmeriCorps grantees with a common end date of August 31, 2011. Depending on the types of terms you are anticipating for AmeriCorps members in your program (full time, part time, quarter time, minimum time) this may or may not be compatible with a plan for a rolling enrollment. If not, ServeNebraska would consider allowing a "no cost" extension past the August 31 date. The "no cost" extension means that no additional funds would be allocated for the extended period of time but that you could expend grant funds past the August 31 date.

ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS & USES

9. Can a United Way apply for an AmeriCorps grant?

Yes.

10. Is it permissible to form a partnership with other organizations meeting a similar need in different communities within Nebraska?

Yes. Collaborations are encouraged.

11. Is it permissible to form a partnership with other organizations meeting differing needs within the same community or geographic region in Nebraska?

Yes. Collaborations are encouraged. It is important to structure the application so that it addresses the varied roles members would perform.

12. An organization is serving as the applicant and lead agency. This organization will handle financial transactions & reporting and overall coordination of the grant. A partner organization will serve as a host site – assuming significant responsibility for supervision and training. Which organization should be reflected in the Organizational Capability section of the proposal?

It is most important to highlight the lead agency in the Organization Capability section. Since the partner organization will have a significant role it would also be beneficial to more succinctly highlight its role and capability as well.

13. Our organization is partnering with an lead agency that has not previously applied for Corporation for National & Community Service funds. Our organization has applied for CNCS funds previously. Does our lead agency partner need to create an new eGrants account?

Yes.

Since the lead agency will be new to eGrants, they would have to establish a unique eGrants account. This process is fairly simple and intuitive. On the initial eGrants page -- https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp -- in the white area between the two gold areas, there is a link labeled "Don't have an eGrants account? Create an account". Clicking this link and filling in the appropriate spaces should establish the account. Peter Cales [peter.cales@nebraska.gov or 402-471-6228] and Greg Donovan [greg.donovan@nebraska.gov or (402) 471-6249] are available if there are any difficulties with this process. As stated in the Request for Applications, Peter Cales is available to provide an orientation and guidance on the use of eGrants.

14. Our organization is principally focused on meeting human needs and disaster preparedness but we promoted a specific bill during the last legislative session, are we eligible to apply?

Yes. For specific questions related to the potential eligibility of an applicant organization as it relates to the prohibition on political activity by AmeriCorps grantees, please contact Greg Donovan at 402-471-6249 or greg.donovan@nebraska.gov

15. Can I request funding primarily for secretarial support?

No. AmeriCorps funds are to be used to engage dedicated individuals in direct service to meet needs in their communities, not for office or clerical functions.

BUDGET

16. What expenses should be charged to the grant and which should be local in-kind match?

The decision of which line items – and portions of line items - to charge to the grant funds and which to absorb via local match is a managerial one to be made by organizational leadership in crafting the grant proposal. There are no requirements for federal or local shares for any line items. The key figures to keep in mind in constructing the grant budget are $13,000 – the maximum total federal funds available per full-time AmeriCorps member AND 24% - the total match ratio for the budget that must be met for first year programming. If your program is in subsequent grant years, higher match levels may apply. Contact Janet Schmidt, ServeNebraska Operations & Fiscal Officer at 402-471-6212 or janet.schmidt@nebraska.gov.

17. Regarding indirect costs, is this money that becomes available with the Grant to cover indirect expenses? In other words, does the lead agency get these funds without a specific line item other than the Indirect Cost?

Yes. Indirect costs are those organizational expenses that are not directly related to the performance of AmeriCorps project objectives, but are essential for strong management and organizational excellence. Examples of things that might fall under indirect costs are payroll

& expense processing costs, space & utilities costs for finance staff, and supervision of program staff. These do not need to be delineated or broken out in separate line items.

18. What administrative support via grant funds is available for education-award-only programs?

As stated in the Request for Applications, $600 per full-time education-award-only AmeriCorps member is available to support operating costs associated with education-award-only programming. It is possible to utilize education-award-only and stipended AmeriCorps members in the same program. Please contact Greg Donovan at 402-471-6249 or greg.donovan@nebraska.gov to discuss possibilities if this of interest.

AMERICORPS MEMBER BENEFITS

19. For part-time members, is it permissible to pay the living allowance based on attendance? In other words, if a member misses a day without giving proper notice, can pay be deducted from the next living allowance check?

Pay may not be withheld for non-attendance on a given day since the member living allowance is not tied to specific hours or service provided. Payment of the living allowance must be equally divided over pay periods through the term of service. As long as a member remains in good standing, the living allowance must be paid. If attendance is an issue, the disciplinary process should be followed - potentially resulting in suspension without pay at a point in the process. There is no requirement to pay a living allowance to less-than-full-time members although most programs pay less-than-full-time members a living allowance to maximize recruitment and reward effort.

20. Are applicants required to budget FICA for AmeriCorps members?

Yes

21. Do applicants need to budget for worker's compensation for AmeriCorps members?

Yes. If applicants do not wish to provide worker's compensation, they must purchase a supplemental insurance policy to provide similar benefits.

22. Do applicants need to budget for unemployment insurance for AmeriCorps members?

No.

23. Should applicants budget benefits for AmeriCorps members as part of the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS) share or the matching share?

Each applicant can decide which line items and expenditures are to be covered with grant (CNCS) funds or matching resources. There is no guidance on specific line items. The total budget must meet identified match thresholds.

24. Can grant funds be used to pay for AmeriCorps member health insurance?

Yes – for full-time stipended AmeriCorps members only.

25. What are the specific requirements for health insurance for AmeriCorps members?

The scope of health insurance required is defined in the AmeriCorps Provisions as follows:

> *IV. I. LIVING ALLOWANCES, OTHER IN-SERVICE BENEFITS, AND TAXES*
> 5. Health Care Coverage. The grantee must provide a health care policy to those full-time members not otherwise covered by a health care policy at the time of enrollment into the AmeriCorps program, or to those members who lose coverage during their term of service as a result of participating in the Program or through no deliberate act of their own. The Corporation will not cover health care costs for family members or for less than full-time members.
>
> a. Minimum Benefits. The health care policy must meet the following minimum benefits:
>
> i. Physician services for illness or injury;
> ii. Hospital room and board;
> iii. Emergency room;
> iv. X-ray and laboratory;
> v. Prescription drugs;
> vi. Limited mental/nervous disorders;
> vii. Limited substance abuse coverage;
> viii. An annual deductible of no more than $250 charges per member;
> ix. No more than $1,000 total annual out-of-pocket per member;
> x. A 20% co-pay or a comparable fixed fee with the exception of a 50% co-pay for mental and substance abuse care; and
> xi. A maximum benefit of at least $50,000 per occurrence or cause.
>
> b. Obtaining Health Care Coverage. You may obtain health care insurance for your members through any provider you choose, as long as the policy provides the minimum benefits and is not excessive in cost. If you use a health care policy that charges more than $150 per month to the Corporation you must send a copy of the policy along with a summary of its coverage and costs to the Corporation's Office of Grants Management.
>
> c. Half-Time Members. Although no portion of health insurance expenses for halftime members may be paid from Corporation funds, you may choose to provide health care to half-time members from other sources.

d. Less Than Full-Time Members serving in a Full-Time Capacity. Less than full-time members who are serving in a full-time capacity for a sustained period of time (such as a full-time summer project) may be eligible for health care benefits supported with Corporation funds.

26. Do we need to provide our own health insurance or is there a product in existence that we pay into?

ServeNebraska and the Corporation for National & Community Service do not endorse specific providers, but to assist with budgeting and to provide an example, information for one firm that has developed an AmeriCorps member insurance policy -- SRC, which is affiliated with Aetna, can be found at: http://www.src-web.com/public/americorps.html

On page 2 of the document connected to the "overview" link in the first line of the 4th paragraph are per member costs. Specific benefits of each of the two plans offered by SRC are documented in "Plan 1" and "Plan 2" links in that same paragraph.

27. Do fringe benefits need to be paid for education-award-only AmeriCorps members?

No

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

28. How many Performance Measures should I have?

The number of Performance Measures is dictated by the program design you propose. It is important that performance measures be created so that they are easy to implement and provide measures that clearly indicate progress and success.

ServeNebraska hopes that each applicant would have at least three performance measures. At least one of these should address the primary focus of the project – the work being done to meet the identified need. Additionally, since volunteer mobilization and the professional development of the individuals enrolled as AmeriCorps members are key facets of AmeriCorps, at least one performance measure should address each of these areas. There is no maximum number of performance measures.

As stated in the Request for Applications, at least one performance measure must have an output, intermediate outcome, and end outcome. Other performance measures must have at least an output.

TRAINING

29. In the Request for Applications there is a reference to trainings to be provided to AmeriCorps Members. What constitutes a training? Are we talking about 1.5-2 hour sessions or does this refer to more extensive training programs, i.e. day long trainings?

The notion of trainings as it relates to AmeriCorps members is broad. Put simply, training covers professional development activities that position an individual to successfully undertake their AmeriCorps responsibilities and provides them with skills that will prove useful after service.

In order to complement the offerings of varied AmeriCorps programs, ServeNebraska also offers a slate of trainings annually. This slate is created based upon past experience and input from AmeriCorps members and administrators and updated frequently. This listing may be found at: http://www.serve.nebraska.gov/training/training_schedule.html