

Grant Proposal Report from Task Force

Recommendation: Fund with condition that corrections are made to the budget, the narrative is clarified regarding the supervisor of AmeriCorps members, performance measures are clarified, and the other items referenced below (Conditions/Corrections) are resolved before the application is submitted. Grant award of CNCS funds to be no more than \$30,384 with a match of at least \$13,022.

Legal Applicant: Alford Youth Center

Program Name: Alford Youth Center

Category: AC Formula -- Standard
 AC Formula – Rural State
 AC Competitive
 Other Competition

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Price
 Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area:

Applicant type: New (no prior AmeriCorps)
 Re-compete (# of yrs: __)

Proposed Dates: 3/01/2020 to 12/31/2020

Requested Resources: Funds and Slots (*indicates sections with calculation errors)

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	*12,782		5,480
Member Support	30,890		2,016
Indirect (Admin)	*338		*1,350
CNCS Award amount		Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	
% sharing proposed	81%		19%
% share required	70%		30%
Cost-per-member proposed	\$22,005 (\$15,192 allowed)		

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 2.0	Slot Types Requested						
	FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT		Total
Slots With living allowance	2						2
Slots with only ed award							

Program Description (executive summary):

The Alford Youth Center proposes to have 2 AmeriCorps members who will build capacity in a new community volunteer mentor program in the Greater Waterville Area (served by Alford Youth Center). At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for designing and launching a volunteer driven community mentor program for at-risk youth. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 50 volunteers who will be engaged in mentoring youth participating in our licensed after school program (ages 6-12). This program will concentrate on the CNCS "Education Focus Area". * The CNCS investment of \$30,384 will be matched with \$13022, \$6511 in public funding and \$6511 in private funding.

Service locations:

- Alford Youth Center after school program sites: ●
- Atwood Primary School (RSU 18)
 - South End Teen Center (KVCAP),
 - North End Learning Center (Waterville Housing Authority)

Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.

Local schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA

Will the applicant place AmeriCorps members with other agencies? Yes No

Applicant proposes to deliver services:

- Within a single municipality Within a single County but not covering the entire County
 County-wide in a single County Multiple Counties but not Statewide
Statewide

Performance measures (targets proposed for Year 1; targets for years 2 and 3 set in continuations):

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 50

OUTCOME: ED5A: Number of students with improved academic performance

Proposed target: 50

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT (targets were not proposed for measures listed in the RFP)

OUTPUT: Number of AmeriCorps program training and other formal development activities that result in increased AmeriCorps member skills, knowledge, and abilities related to the service assignment

Proposed target: ? TBD

OUTCOME: Number of AmeriCorps members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge.

Proposed target: ? TBD

CAPACITY BUILDING (proposing measures that are different than measures listed in RFP; need to discuss to see if these are truly more appropriate)

OUTPUT: G3-3.4: Number of organizations that received capacity building services

Proposed target: 3

OUTPUT: G3-3.10A Number of organizations that increase efficiency, effectiveness, and/or program reach

Proposed target: 3

OUTCOME: Number of volunteers placed in mentor/tutor roles

Proposed target: 50

Scoring Detail:

Peer Reviewer Consensus Score. *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Program Design		
Need	Adequate	3.35
Intervention	Strong	8
Theory of Change, Evidence & Logic Model	Adequate	5.36
Work Plan	Adequate	5.36
Notice Priority	Strong	1
Member Training	Adequate	4.02
Member Supervision	Adequate	4.02
Member Experience	Adequate	3.35
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identity	Adequate	2.01
Organizational Capability		
Organizational Background & Staffing	Strong	10
Compliance/Accountability	Adequate	10.05
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Substandard	0
Data Plan Quality	n/a for first time, rural	
Total Peer Reviewer Score		56.52

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Program Model	Adequate	10.05
Past Performance	Adequate	10.05
Financial Plan	Substandard	0
Fiscal Systems	Adequate	6.7
Total Task Force Score		26.8
Peer Review Score		56.52
Final Score for Applicant		83.32

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward or fund with no corrections/modifications
- Forward or fund with corrections/modifications
- Do Not Forward or fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- Correct budget issues (consistent treatment of benefits, calculation of indirect, add in required accident/injury insurance for AmeriCorps members, background checks for staff charged to grant are not in budget, Cost-per-MSY is \$11,000 over maximum, clarify supply calculation and expense – as written they don't work). Note the text and Source of funds listing indicate totals that would be compliant with match but the expense budget does not match text or source of funds. Appears it may have been done by 2 different people who didn't consult each other.
- Clarify why proposed change in capacity building performance measures and set targets for member development performance measures.
- Complete logic model (RFP noted it should be entered after decision so staff can provide training)
- Clarify start date. RFP had start date of March 2020; one part of application indicates September 2020 start.

Note: The task force requested clarifications before meeting on December 16. The applicant responded promptly. The Financial Management Survey was completed by a person with knowledge of the agency financial systems and the concerns raised by the first set of answers are now resolved. The applicant acknowledged that multiple people were involved with the budget and they did not intend to request more than permitted.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design. *This section covers the community need, service to be performed in response to need, evidence the service will be effective, roles for AmeriCorps and partners, performance measures, and anticipated results for year one.*

Need

- The information concerning the number of students receiving Free Lunch - 53% of students receive USDA free lunch
- Describes how the community meets the definition of rural, and is high-need as well as some anecdotal successes in engaging community members.
- It addressed a good number of criteria and need generally.
- Needed more grounding of the issue. Rural transportation, after-school activities, child care discussed but not with local data. The citations were from MSN – must be able to find other sources.

Intervention

- Proposed intervention is based on evidence based mentoring program and includes information about the mentoring used in local programs.
- Evidence-based, off prior experience. Detailed intervention
- Could see people working with kids based on description.

Theory of change, evidence of effectiveness, and logic model

> Comments for theory of change

- Cites other programs that have been successful in raising GPAs
- Nationally recognized programming but dated.
- Didn't seem to read instructions. Were directed to omit logic model but entered one.
- Would have been stronger to describe how model fit local population.

> Comments on Evidence of Effectiveness

- I would have liked a more specific number: such as on average GPA have increased by a number of points or percentages in prior programs
- Significant evidence, with legitimate practitioners, but dated. Post 2000 data and reporting exists on the importance of mentoring.
- Did a good job discussing organization and prior initiatives but, moving forward, there wasn't detail on more current model. Reliance was on 20 year old model from national affiliate.
- Need better, up-to-date evidence. If they've been doing this so long, surprising they have not done evaluation of their own program.

Work plan

- Onboard is not a verb. One hires, recruits, trains, but no one can be onboarded. However, the plan itself seems workable.
- Would be stronger with tangible indicators of progress- i.e., how many students
- Defining scope is important in the work plan given it is a limited period of time with a limited number of people.
- Information was in other place in proposal but there was criteria here it didn't respond to.

Notice Priority

- I would have preferred for them to stay within the Education focus, instead of writing more about the economic impact than the educational impact
- The education priority is clearly covered in this proposal

Member Training

- I would like to know the specific skills that members will acquire that will provide value to future employers; and what will be valuable to the members themselves.
- Standard training, but what job-specific training is provided? Or what will differentiate these members?
- What is the value added for members – only standard trainings are listed.

Member Supervision

- How often will members meet with their supervisor; from whom will they receive support and guidance; what are the qualifications of the "number of team members"?
- Multiple points of contact are listed

Member Experience

- I would like to know the specific skills that members will acquire that will provide value to future employers; and what will be valuable to the members themselves.
- Network connections. More unique gains could be identified.
- Dismayed they did such an eloquent job of describing what a wonderful organization they are and then really did not pay attention to the benefit to the potential members.
- AC member voluntary service is in many ways sacrificial and, as agencies, we need to be offering spectacular experience and members should know going in, what skills they can expect to have at the end, what opportunities they can expect to have. Could have done a much better job of describing what opportunities life in the Waterville area can offer if the person opts to serve with them.
- This section checked the boxes and rephrased proposal text. This section should be about the “pull” – why the Alford project meets the opportunity cost of being a para-educator in a fully professional assignment.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identity

- Meets criteria by repeating it in narrative, but no further activity
- Did not follow instruction to include AmeriCorps in the name of the project.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- I like that the experience of the leadership of the organization was included in this section.
- Dual organizational heritage. Diverse experience of staff

Compliance and Accountability

- The information about the "trifecta" of accountability demonstrates the commitment of the organization to accountability.
- Demonstrated standards
- Mentioned the audits and asserted they haven't done anything wrong. Didn't describe internal controls or how they are vigilant. Didn't demonstrate their staff is trained to monitor for concerns.
- Don't have any concern but often defer to national organizations they are associated with.

Budget Adequacy and Cost Effectiveness. (CNCS no longer allows narrative for this section. They directed reviewers to consider the budget narrative and its formulas, accuracy, expense items.)

- The narrative was not so much a narrative, but a chart, but it seemed thorough.
- Reasonable costs
- Was over cost-per-member and did not meet required match. Several items are calculated incorrectly.

Comments on likelihood of being successful:

- They have experienced personnel working with the members, and the need for increased mentoring to be provided though the program was established
- Adequate understanding of programming and demonstrated stewardship of funding.
- All the weaknesses can be fixed. It seems they have a strong program to present. They are highly likely to be successful.
- The person who had the 15 years experience seems a tad overconfident in the agency reputation – depending on reputation to carry it.
- Needs more emphasis on the member in the proposal would have made it stronger as would up-to-date research.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

Although the focus is stated as Education, there is as much attention given to capacity building as education. I sometimes had to refer back to the need category to see what this was about.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- The proposed use of AmeriCorps members to work in this program seems consistent with the purpose of the program and with the RFP.
- Worthwhile proposal, but needs better consideration of the particular elements that will make this intervention successful, or transformative on the community, AmeriCorps members, and/or organization.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Model. *This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and it's demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.*

- While the application and narrative lacks articulation of specific targets and outcomes, it greatly demonstrated need and experience in effecting impactful and meaningful change to the community it serves and wishes to serve further.
- The Program is aligned with the goal of education and capacity building. I like the dual mentor approach.
- Aligns with the Education focus area, although also emphasizes capacity building but in the context of developing mentors to work with students to improve educational performance. The need to improve student performance/educational outcomes is a priority we are trying to address. While the applicant quoted some information on the success of the project mentoring model, it was not quantified in a way to determine how great an impact the program is likely to have and the validating data seems somewhat dated.
- Clearly, the mentoring model is an approach than numerous economically disadvantaged communities are implementing in an effort to improve performance. While some of these programs have shown positive individual results, it's not as clear as to whether they have dramatically changed the outcomes in underperforming school systems. Even if this program is successful in reaching 150 students, that is still a relatively small percentage of total school aged children in the area. If it works, the question is how can it be implemented at even greater scale.
- On this one [internal/external focus, ultimate goals of this funding and the need], it's split about 50/50, with half of the focus on working with students and the remainder on establishing a volunteer system to provide the majority of the support to the students. Since the latter capacity building effort seems primarily focused on providing educational support, I'd go with a primary focus on external impact.
- Yes, it meets the criteria for a rural grant and funding limits.
- Yes the program model is one that is permitted under AmeriCorps.
- The organization has some history of using volunteers and appears to be looking to further develop the role of volunteers through recruitment and volunteer management. They have an individual who has been trained in volunteer management and the organization seems to be working to expand and improve this

area of its' programming. My choice of adequate as opposed to strong is because the proposal doesn't fully explain the mentoring models proposed to be used and the supporting documentation is limited to a reference to an old evaluation of one program without any specifics on actual outcomes.

- The proposal narrative devoted a significant amount of space to the agency reputation and didn't allocate enough narrative to describing the program. As a result, there are details one expects to see that are not presented.
- The evidence of effectiveness citations are truly old. The narrative presents what is required but it is disjointed.

Assessment of Past Performance

- I was unable to make a determination of past performance from the materials provided HOWEVER due to my own personal experiences with the organization (as a community member) I would lean towards the organization being more than capable of succeeding in achieving the goals described.
- It looks like they have a history of implementing successful programs, but I agree with the staff assessment and would like to know if they had a similar type of program and what the outcomes were.
- While they didn't cite a specific grant, it is clear that they have received a number of grants over the years, are familiar with grant management and reporting requirements, and appear to be successfully managing these funds based on the most recent audit.
- Not clear that the grants they have received require a match, but most likely given the number and size, at least some of them would have.
- Given the dollar volume, it is likely new staff and resources were required. Again, it appears they successfully managed these grants, although no outcome data was presented.
- "Were the outcomes or targets established for grant support accomplished or met? According to the evaluation information, how well did the applicant organization perform? Is there evidence the funder's purpose or goal was achieved?"
No data was provided.
- This is a well-established organization with a track record of handling grant funding and grant and non-grant programming. While the application did not provide specifics as to an individual grant that they managed and the outcomes of it, I'm satisfied they have the needed experience to handle one of ours.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- The financial information provided seems to indicate that the organization is capable of achieving desired outcomes
- Need to fix the math and matching shortfalls, but seems reasonable.
- Proposal is over allowable member cost. The budget numbers on the face sheet and in the actual budget do not match the budget numbers in the Executive Summary. The face sheet and budget numbers do not provide the required 30% of total budget local match. Other budget corrections are required.

Fiscal Systems

- The information provided seemed to indicate that the organization would be more than capable of managing and administering funds in compliance with guidelines and requirements.
- They have the capacity.
- Among the rural applications I have reviewed, this one seems to be the strongest in terms of an organization with the necessary staff, funding, and capabilities to take on an AmeriCorps grant. They have a sizable staff and budget, a clean audit, and specialized staff that can guide the project. I would note, however, some of the comments in the staff review regarding having the financial survey redone by financial staff of the agency to address certain issues that appear incorrectly reported or confusing, particularly the question of whether and how grant funds are segregated and separately accounted for. Eligibility for federal funding also needs to be checked, although I assume this will not be a problem.
- I suspect that their systems are actually stronger than is reflected in the application.

Do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? YES (3)

- The applicant's prior experience and efforts at utilizing community collaboration to strengthen and improve positive outcomes of the most disadvantaged youth of its local communities belies its proposal. I feel the methodology for building further capacity modeled on its current mentoring program (through OJP) and strategy for creating a sustainable program is well thought out.
- They have the organizational capacity and staff skill set to make an impact on this population.
- Among the rural applications I have reviewed, this one seems to be the strongest in terms of an organization with the necessary staff, funding, and capabilities to take on an AmeriCorps grant. They have a sizable staff and budget, a clean audit, and specialized staff that can guide the project.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- Some of the issues noted by peer reviewers and staff are unclear: specific assessment of past performances as well as volunteer management; whether the proposed programming is a shared goal of AYC or of one person.
- I would note, however, some of the comments in the staff review regarding having the financial survey redone by financial staff of the agency to address certain issues that appear incorrectly reported or confusing, particularly the question of whether and how grant funds are segregated and separately accounted for. Eligibility for federal funding also needs to be checked, although I assume this will not be a problem.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- I feel like this proposal is a well intentioned and well supported one but I am also keen on ensuring that the program is one that is set up to succeed, not to fail. I would really like the concerns of staff and those who have more experience with these grant applications to be voiced and answered, and if necessary (or applicable/allowable) the applicant provided opportunity to, or be required to, address those concerns.
- Recommend for funding subject to conditions including budget corrections to comply with per member cap and required local match; clarification of questions regarding financial systems and grant accounting; and clarification of the organization's intent to implement best practices in managing volunteers.

NOTE: GTF reviewers directed Commission staff to request clarifications from the applicant with a deadline that would provide responses to the task force before it's final meeting about award recommendations.

Subsequently a letter was sent and the deadline for response set for Friday, 12/13.

The text excerpt is below.

- *The responses on the Financial Management Systems Survey are contradictory within the document. Please have a member of the organization's financial staff complete the document and resubmit.*
- *The auditor's management letters were not submitted with the audit as directed. Please provide.*
- *Two known mentoring programs are not mentioned in the narrative. One, Colby Cares for Kids, is part of an AmeriCorps program funded by the Commission. Please explain how the proposed program interfaces with those programs.*
- *The budget was incomplete/substandard for the following reasons:*
 - *The required match was not met and the cost-per-member far exceeded the allowable maximum.*
 - *The Source of Funds amounts, Executive Summary description of funds, and budget amounts do not match. In fact, each has different numbers.*
 - *Benefits for personnel were charged in full to the grant even though the percent of time was far less than 100%.*
 - *National Criminal History checks for staff charged to the grant under grantee share were not budgeted and no explanation for the omission was given in the text.*
 - *Accident injury insurance for members is not included in the budget. This is required by federal law.*

- *Indirect is not calculated according to instructions. CNCS share is under by \$2100, grantee share is under by \$1600.*

Given these and other issues in the budget, please confirm the organization is requesting the maximum grant allowed of \$30,384 and can at least match at the 30% required rate. Also indicate whether budget corrections can be made in a timely manner.

- *The budget has a personnel line for a lead teacher while the narrative leads the reader to believe the grant manager will be the program director. Please clarify who will be the director, what is the role of the lead teacher, and whether the employees who will work alongside the AmeriCorps members are supportive.*

This letter does not include all the issues, just those that the Grants Task Force needs to consider in making final recommendations. If the proposal is funded the full set of edits and corrections will be provided and Commission staff assist with the process.