Grant Selection Process Report

Legal Applicant: Eastern Maine Development Corporation **Program name:** Northern Maine AmeriCorps Collaborative

Recommendation: Fund

Reviewers: Review conducted in December 2016 under the more rigorous criteria of the AmeriCorps State Competitive process was done by David Wihry, Ed Barrett. Then, the full task force recommended forwarding it to the national competition. That recommendation was supported in the full MCCS vote in January 2017 and the proposal was entered into the selection competition run by CNCS.

Of the two applications submitted, one was selected by the federal agency for funding and this one was not selected. Because of some very unusual circumstances (a program has decided not to continue into the final year of its grant) the Commission has funding to cover this award and permission from the state Division of Purchases to do so if the recommendation to fund is endorsed by the full Commission.

In the May/June 2017 process of considering whether to fund this application, the applicant was asked to respond to feedback from the federal competition by making the community service activities of AmeriCorps members more evident.

For these reasons, this first page of the report has been updated and replaces the 12/2016 page. However, the scoring and most of the comments still apply. (Math errors in the budget were corrected.)

Grant Category: ☒ Formula ☐ Competitive ☐ Other Competition

Performance Period: ☒ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☐ Year 3

Type: ☒ Operating ☐ Planning ☐ Fixed Price ☐ Ed Award Only

Start/End Date: 10/01/2017 to 9/30/2020

ME Priority Area: Economic Opportunity

Fed Priority Area(s): Economic Opportunity

Request for New Resources

			CNCS	Local
New CNCS Funds:	$128,838.00	**Cost sharing proposed**	41 %	59 %
Match Committed:	$186,202.00	**Min. Match required**		*30 %*
Total Grant Budget:	$315,040.00			
Cost Per Member:	$ 12,807			

AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 10.06

	FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT
Slots with living allowance		7			31
Education Award only					

Total prior years with CNCS funding: 2

Prior experience with CNCS funding: [describe type of grant and how many 3 year grants applicant has had; any special notes about prior funding such as whether it was same or different model, another category of funding.]

Organization assumed oversight of an existing AmeriCorps program that was woefully non-compliant in April of 2015 and completed the 3 year grant cycle. The program showed great effort at both correcting deficiencies it had inherited and proactively seeking assistance with emerging issues. Performance on outcome targets increased dramatically and recruitment and retention improved, though the program was under-enrolled in part time positions (though 100% enrolled in full-time).

Statement of Need (from application narrative):

The program is designed to support economically disadvantaged youth by increasing their access to employment and training services, identifying prospects for livable wage jobs, and providing platforms for on the job experience. Due to economic distress in the communities served caused by loss of manufacturing jobs, recession, factory closures and the high number of displaced workers, there is increased competition for local jobs and the local youth do not have the skills needed to qualify for the local jobs that are available.

Program Summary (from application):

[Insert Executive Summary from opening of application narrative.]

This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area of Economic Opportunity, specifically increasing economic opportunity for communities by engaging opportunity youth as AmeriCorps members.

EMDC proposes to have 35 AmeriCorps members (4 HT and 31 QT) who will be assisting their host sites in providing job skills enhancements and training sessions to 80 economically disadvantaged individuals. Majority of the members will meet the CNCS's description of Economically Disadvantaged/ Opportunity Youth criteria. The members will serve in the Maine counties of Piscataquis, Penobscot, Hancock, and Washington.

At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for 30 individuals (including the members themselves) entering into employment, higher education, another year of national service, or military service. In addition, the members will leverage an additional 50 volunteers who will be engaged in helping the host complete its mission of providing job skills enhancements and trainings.

Identified partners:

[List partners identified by peer reviewers and task force reviewers.]

United Way of Eastern Maine, Bangor Historical Society , Bangor Housing, MaineStream Finance (Penquis), University of Maine Augusta-Bangor Campus, The Charlotte White Center, Bangor Area Recovery Network, Bangor Career Center, Orono-Old Town Adult Education, Sunrise Economic Council, Penobscot Theatre Company, Northeastern Workforce Development Board, Machias Career Center, Bangor Area Homeless Shelter

SCORING DETAIL

I. Summary of Peer Reviewer Consensus Scores

CATEGORY	Qualitative Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need	Strong	0.038
Intervention	Satisfactory	0.075
Theory of Change and Logic Model	Satisfactory	9.5
Evidence Base	Pre-preliminary	2
Notice Priority	Strong	2.25
Member Training	Strong	3
Member Supervision	Satisfactory	1
Member Experience	Satisfactory	1.5
Commitment to AmeriCorps ID	Satisfactory	1
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	7.5
Compliance and Accountability	Strong	11.25
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness	Strong	13.5
Budget Adequacy	Strong	5.25
Evaluation Plan (0 indicates reviewed it)	Satisfactory	0
TOTAL		**57.9**

II. Summary of Task Force Consensus Rating and Final Score:

Category	Rating	Numeric Score
Program Alignment & Model (15 possible points)	Satisfactory	7.5
Past Performance (15 possible points)	Strong	11.25
Financial Plan (10 possible points)	Strong	7.5
Fiscal Systems (10 possible points)	Strong	7.5
GTF Review Total:	**33.75**	of 50 possible

III. Final Combined Score

Total	**91.61**	of 150 possible

Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Forward Application to National Competition with no Corrections
- ☒ Forward to National Competition with Corrections
- ☐ Do Not Forward to National Competition

Final Recommendation of Grant Selection and Performance Task Force:

The narrative needs to be improved.
The needs statement should be rewritten.
The inconsistencies between the budget narrative and application narrative should be corrected to match one another.
The budget has calculation errors. The budget narrative needs to be resubmitted.

Referenced Conditions/Corrections:

1. list if any

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED

Program Design (50 %)

Comments: Need

- Applicant cites clear and immediate need by demonstrating proof of economic disparity in the communities they propose to serve. Assessment is based on unemployment rates and median household incomes: "The unemployment rate for Maine was 4.0% in October 2016; however, the rates worsen when reviewed by community (for example, Millinocket 4.7%; East Millinocket 6.0%, Lincoln 7.4%, Medway 11.5%)" "Reduction of household incomes ($32,000- $37,000 in our region compared to $49,000-$53,000 in Maine and the U.S. collectively)" Loss of manufacturing jobs in recent years due to recession and paper mill closures Lack of skilled workforce and jobs in the local commuting area Locals do not have the skills needed to qualify for the local jobs that are available "With the high number of displaced workers, the competition for jobs has increased even for those jobs traditionally filled by younger workers." "For businesses that do have job openings, the lack of a skilled and able workforce makes filling vacant jobs challenging." The applicant did not provide sufficient factual evidence in support of the stressors referenced in second paragraph, which would have strengthened their need argument.
- The applicant provides strong evidence demonstrating economic distress in the communities served by the proposed AmeriCorps program. They cite evidence such as recent closure of employers, high unemployment rates, and the 2008 recession. However, the need for disadvantaged youth (and other economically disadvantaged individuals) to receive job skills training is less strongly supported. It is briefly mentioned that despite the high unemployment rate, businesses with vacancies are unable to find skilled workers. There is no evidence presented to affirm this statement. Contradictory information is presented, "regional jobs are scarce…"
- Well documented economic distress and why it would disadvantage youth.
- Notice that they provided general facts but didn't support need to focus on opportunity youth. If disadvantaged youth are trained, are there jobs for them to take.

Comments: Intervention

- The need is about a big economic distress and job loss across the region. The intervention is focused on youth where there may be no jobs.
- Not clear why focus on youth and how or if the program will give the youth a leg up. Not compelling – didn't connect the dots well. Satisfactory.

Comments: Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model

- Applicant clearly articulates the design, target population, and roles of AmeriCorps members and leveraged volunteers in the narrative text: "Serve-alongside model, four 900-hour members will serve concurrently with thirty-one 450-hour opportunity youth members (10.20 MSY's), at 17 different host sites. All members will be co-enrolled in WIOA programming in either the Bangor or Machias Career Center." Summer Youth Employment Program (450-hour members) Purpose – "outreach and job skills training of economically disadvantaged individuals" "Leveraging a total of 50 volunteers at their respective host sites that will assist in outreach and job skills training of economically disadvantaged individuals" "Eastern Maine Development Corporation will provide in depth, ongoing soft skills and job development training to AmeriCorps members who also assist their host sites in providing similar training as part of their national service." Applicant is building on existing systems and has a strong foundation: Career Compass and Work Experience programs as a part of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Previous success with AmeriCorps program – "19 of the 21 members in PY 2015 stayed in Maine" Applicant proposal has a twofold benefit – providing job skills and career development training and support to economically disadvantaged individuals who may or may not also be members Logic model (2 pages)

identifies short, medium, and long term objectives and outcomes that are concise, measurable, and (conceivably) achievable.

- The intervention impacting outcomes for members is clear; summer work experiences lead to "measurable increase in work readiness" and prior success of EMDC's WIA program's job/school placement suggests that the outcomes can be met by this program. However, the outcomes for clients receiving services is less supported by a well-described intervention or evidence. Clients will receive a variety of economic opportunity services including: general job training/skill development; financial literacy; community resource navigation; volunteer/training opportunities; soft skills training; transportation solutions; first time home buyers assistance; food security; career programming; and continuing education. These are wide ranging interventions and there is not a thorough description or evidence provided to support how the intervention will specifically achieve the outcomes for clients. The rationale for the selected outcomes is not provided. The proposed outcomes may or may not be significant contributions because existing efforts are not described. Logic Model is missing several elements requested in the instructions: duration, intensity, and target population for the intervention; and an alphanumeric reference to National Performance Measures.
- Serve alongside model. • Piggybacks on successful WIOA effort with substantial detail provided. • Ambitious list of partners and projects for capturing the imagination of participants. • The outcome goal seems underwhelming (50%) when the WIA program referenced achieved significantly smaller results. I would have rated this "strong" but for that. The narrative should articulate why achieving something less than the evidence based model is appropriate, if it is.
- In terms of whether the activities would make any significant dent on the need in the community. The activities for members and clients were very wide ranging. Not clear how the activities would tie into outcomes – not coherent. Why aiming so low for impact on beneficiaries if the prior program was successful and worth replicating. No explanation or rationale for selected outcomes.

Comments: Evidence

- Applicant provided only two studies – WIOA Youth Program evaluation by the State of Maine and a study by the Brookings Institute, which is why I have classified it as pre-preliminary, although the applicant argued otherwise. State of Maine evaluation of the WIOA Youth Program "EMDC's WIOA Youth Program is evaluated by an outside agency (the state of Maine) and compared to state and national performance measure goals in an outcome study. Evaluation of the last three year data sets in the preliminary evidence outcome study, EMDC, and their DOL partner in the Machias Career Center, have consistently exceeded state and national performance measure goals in PY's 2013, 2014, and 2015." Applicant stated that the main data collection tool will be the Maine Department of Labor's workforce data system. Applicant demonstrates how the data relates to their logic model: "These data demonstrate EMDC's (and Machias Career Center's) ability to provide training opportunities and connections that result in literacy/numeracy gains (which improve a youth's overall employability), and placement in either higher education or the workplace." Brookings Institute report – applicant does not directly reference conclusions from this report, instead they reference a report with the report from the Department of Labor's evaluation of Summer Youth Employment Initiative (SYEI) – a "research study by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc that was submitted to the Department of Labor and examined "Lessons from the 2009 Recovery Act Summer Youth Employment Initiative" The applicant does not delve deeply into the details of the study but instead references the success of the study and impact on the participants in order to support their argument that their proposed summer jobs program (SYEP) will likely have a measurable impact on the participating individuals and communities "Administrators and staff at the 20 study sites reported a perceived threefold effect from the SYEI. First, they got money into the hands of needy families. Second, youth and their families spent this new disposable income in a depressed economy. Third, youth gained valuable work experience, increasing their human capital and long-term job prospects. Although the study was unable to assess how meaningful youth experiences were or how their experiences could affect them and their communities over time, site visits revealed many interesting, creative, and innovative activities." Although the applicant has not conducted any independent studies, the pre-preliminary evidence does indicate that

their proposed inputs, outputs, and outcomes are reasonable, evidence based and have a strong chance of success.

- The applicant describes the evidence tier as “preliminary evidence outcome study”, however they do not demonstrate how this study goes beyond routine performance measurement. The evidence described however is a thorough description of the “pre-preliminary evidence tier”. They have shared their performance measure data, collected and tracked relevant metrics, the participants’ outcomes, and described the data collection process/results. There is no summary of the broader body of evidence for these interventions, if it exists. Studies do not include a description of their strength.
- Documented success of WIOA interventions with multiple third party evaluations and positive outcomes, though no detail provided in the narrative of the evaluation methodology, etc, so did not rate as high as I otherwise might have. • Brookings study with lessons to be replicated.
- List data collected but it wasn’t described. Do not describe how data in study is beyond performance measurement. Did a really poor job of making the case for preliminary. They advanced as fact that the study was an outcome study but didn’t support it by addressing criteria.

Comments: Notice Priority

- Applicant’s focus aligns perfectly with both the CNCS and MCCS priorities of economic opportunity. “Specifically, EMDC's grant will address "increasing economic opportunities for communities by engaging opportunity youth" in stipended service roles that also are a model for "service as a pathway to employment." As noted above, EMDC had success with its past AmeriCorps members using service as a pathway to employment, primarily getting hired by their host sites our other host sites within the collaborative.”
- Clear fit with a priority focus area with assertion of prior success meeting this performance measure.
- Clearly articulated economic opportunity for opportunity youth, service as a pathway to success, and reference to past WIOA successes.

Comments: Member Training

- Applicant clearly demonstrates that they are capable of managing a robust program that includes member recruitment, training, and support. These bullets highlight the strengths of the proposed plan: Recruitment efforts will include a variety of sources beyond the traditional AmeriCorps website, including but not limited to, “ regional and statewide networks such as VolunteerMaine, Power In Community, Alliances, UMA Bangor Cornerstone Program, University of Maine Onward Program, and Maine Centers for Women, Work, and Community; Networks from other Maine-based AmeriCorps Programs, vocational rehab centers, Job Corps graduates, students, seniors, students from area colleges, under or unemployed persons and youth through the Bangor Career Center. Applicant proposes to offer training in a variety of subjects for members beyond what is typically required: “Members will be given a two day, comprehensive training that will include an AmeriCorps overview, the rules on abstaining from engaging in prohibited activities, representing AmeriCorps, self-care, community resources, homelessness, food insecurity and generational poverty, among other topics. Members will also receive a one day monthly trainings on a variety of professional development and service-oriented subjects including resume writing, basic financial acumen, group facilitation skills, dress for success, contingency plan creation, and emergency preparedness and reasonable accommodations and the continued importance of abstaining from engaging in prohibited activities, to discuss healthy relationships, managing stress, and how to help when you notice signs of abuse in a customer you are assisting.” Applicant will draw from locally available subject matter experts to conduct these trainings but did not specify who exactly would be conducting the trainings. Having easy access to a list of subject matter experts will allow applicant to invest more time in program support, development, and evaluation.

- Very thorough and comprehensive training plan that includes AmeriCorps prohibited activities, training to increase job placement, and training to support economically disadvantaged individuals.
- There was a list of the various training to be provided though little means judge the quality of the training or why it would be adequate.
- Not clear who would be providing the training, whether they would provide adequate training (credentials).

Comments: Member Supervision

- Applicant clearly demonstrates that supervisors will be trained on providing effective supervision to AmeriCorps members and adhering to the program regulations, priorities and expectations. "Supervisors will be given an orientation and refresher training mid-way through the program that will cover the following: "prohibited activities, the history of AmeriCorps, OnCorps, in-kind calculations, data collection, personal development plans, evaluations, and the discipline process."
- Strong plan for member supervision and training of supervisors.
- Training of supervisors was noted, and it was stated that strong guidance would be provided from the outset, though there was no detail on the actual supervision that would be provided – how it would be provided.
- They describe how supervisors will be trained but didn't provide what supervision would be provided to the members. Just a 3 sentence answer. Couldn't judge the ratio of supervisors to members or what supervision would mean for the member. There are lots of members at quite a few host sites – how is supervision going to be strong across all the sites. High quality maybe. How much support is unknown.

Comments: Member Experience

- The applicant plans to have a well-trained Program Manager who will be bringing back ideas and suggestions for enriching the member experience. Specific highlights within the plan include: Opportunities for members to visit and serve alongside other members within the program Opportunities to discuss AmeriCorps project across the state and country Four community service projects including the "clean up of the Orono Bog Walk in May, assisting SNAP recipients at the local farmers' market and gleaning afterward for area homeless shelters in June, serving at the Seeds of Hope community garden in July, and volunteering to assist with the Bangor Folk Festival" Monthly trainings will include opportunities for self-reflection Members will be connected to the AmeriCorps alumni network
- Clear description of team service projects, participation in reflection activities. Recruitment information was provided in a different section.
- Variety of service opportunities and experiences. • Earlier discussion on recruitment was strong. • Opportunities for reflection were noted, as were opportunities to access the service base.
- Hit all the criteria in satisfactory way. Recruitment may have been earlier in application. Not strongly supported argument on how member experience relates to future employment.

Comments: Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- Applicant has stated that members will learn how to summarize AmeriCorps/their service in an "elevator pitch" and that they will always be wearing AmeriCorps branded material while serving.
- Clear and straightforward plan to teach an elevator pitch to members and members will be branded in service.
- There was mention of branding while in service and the elevator speech; no detail provided.

- How members will be aware of AmeriCorps association is partially addressed. They will be labeled but what does that mean. How community will know – especially since members will be spread out across many sites, doing different service.
- Description is so brief it minimally hits what is required.

Organizational Capability Comments (25%)

Comments Organizational Background and Staffing

- Applicant has a history of success and strong organizational support within the targeted communities as is evidenced by the following statement "EDMC has a rich and well-documented history of cultivating and convening successful partnerships that bring traditional and non-traditional, and public and private partners together to achieve positive change. EMDC has nearly 50 years of experience providing technical assistance and supportive services to communities, businesses, and individuals throughout all of Penobscot, Piscataquis, Hancock, and Waldo Counties. With a staff of 50 professionals, we have offices and resources located in each county and have over the years worked with every town, city and unorganized territory in the region." Applicant has demonstrated success with managing federal grants Applicant has identified 17 community partners. The partners who submitted letters all state that the program will "have a significant impact on the lives and welfare of the people we serve in this region." The letters of support did not adequately describe the benefit to the community provided by the applicant's AmeriCorps members, what activities would not happen without the AmeriCorps members, and the role the partners will take in program implementation.
- Very experienced organization, with over 50 years in existence, a large sized staff (for Maine non-profits) and track record of implementing federal grants.
- Good description of EMDC strength and track record. • An impressive network of partners.
- Letters of support from community members were templates, general. One letter even listed a focus area that is not part of the proposal.

Comments Compliance and Accountability

- The following evidence provided by the applicant supports the requirements for compliance and accountability: Applicant states that the system used to manage their finances is fully integrated and so the tracking of finances is straightforward. Applicant has attested that they will comply with all rules and regulations regarding the funding and will conduct an independent CPA firm to conduct an entity-wide audit conforming to OMB Circular A-133. Expenditures in support of this project will be displayed separately in the audit report." "EMDC also conducts quarterly internal audits of data and performance outcomes, which are compared to plans and key program requirements including adherence to program policies. Trends that need improvement are addressed by corrective action plans." Applicant also stated that the Program Manager will conduct monthly site visits to ensure that host sites are in compliance with the reporting and the prohibited and unallowed practices. Any discrepancies will be identified, corrected, and monitored.
- The organization describes a plan to train host sites, visit regularly, and implement corrective action plans if necessary. They also will be making all of the expenditures from their organization.
- Both internal and external audit commitments were described.

Cost Effectiveness & Budget Adequacy Comments

Comments Cost Effectiveness

- Applicant has prepared a sufficient budget that actually enables them to support members effectively. Please see specific evidence of this below: "Our program will have 10.201 MSY's and a cost per MSY of $13,812. The federal portion of the budget is only 41%, thanks to a partnership with the Department of Labor that will allow us to use funds from WIOA (since our youth customers will be enrolled in that

program simultaneously) to pay for stipends for the 450 hour members, along with their FICA and workers' comp." "The budget is cost effective, with a 58% contribution on the local side. This includes the $25,000 we will raise to cover the local share of our budget, appealing to local business/organizations, and avoiding charging our nonprofit partners site fees to have AmeriCorps placed there." Every element in the budget has a specific purpose, is supported by evidence, and has outcomes that justify the cost

- The budget describes funding for training, a vehicle for transportation and member living allowances that align with the program design. The applicant describes plans to fund raise a cost share from community organizations.
- Leveraging of many different resources • The budget appears to align with the narrative. • The applicant's experience gives it credence.
- Noticed there is an odd line in budget. Van rental is for 12 months but program describes members being in service only 6 months. Why 1 year is not evident and why there should be a cost for time when members were not in service. Needs explanation.

Comments Budget Adequacy

- Budget is submitted without mathematical errors and proposed costs are allowable, reasonable, and allocable to the award. Budget is submitted with adequate information (equations or formulas) to assess how each line item is calculated. Budget is in compliance with the budget instructions. Match is submitted with adequate information to support the amount written in the budget. Applicants provided the following information is in the budget narrative: - the non-CNCS funding and resources necessary to support the project. - the amount of non-CNCS resource commitments, type of commitments (in-kind and/or cash) and the sources of these commitments.
- Budget does not have errors, proposed costs are reasonable and allowable. There is detailed information to demonstrate line item calculations.
- Reference to past exp for program costs was persuasive. • Appears to be in compliance with no errors found.
- There is a discrepancy between narrative portion of budget and the budget form at end. Doesn't add up – 40 members in one place, have 34 members in another, formula for health insurance off too.

Evaluation Plan Comments

- Plan for 3-year grant period
- Applicant identifies theory of change: "With a strong focus on member development, the opportunity youth co-enrolled in both WIOA programming and AmeriCorps will provide an enhanced service experience that will set the member up for either a strong connection to the workforce, an interest in higher education, a committed military service, or a commitment to another year of service." Applicant states that the success of this program will be evaluated by collecting data from the populations served, evaluation of the program itself and tracking outcomes of both. Applicant has identified specific targets and questions they will be asking through the program's term. Evaluation committee will be created to ensure that the program is meeting its goals and that deficiencies will be immediately identified and corrected. Outside evaluator will be hired to complete an outcome study at the program's end. Applicant did not delve into specifics regarding the strengths and limitations of the evaluation they plan to conduct, nor did they state the required qualifications for the outside evaluator.
- Evaluation questions are included, however, a clear study design and detailed components are not included. The applicant describes data to be collected, but is not clear on how that data will be used to analyze outcomes of the program. Qualifications needed for the evaluator are not described.
- Detail on the questions to be asked is provided. • Relies on an evaluation committee and staff rather than an outside evaluator, which raises objectivity questions, though the commitment to continuous evaluation and improvement is there. • There is an outside evaluator to look at data at the end, though no way of

knowing if the data available to the evaluator will be adequate, or what the qualifications of the evaluator (or those on the internal evaluation team) will be. Given this I wavered between weak and satisfactory.

Peer Review Summary Appraisal

1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant could be effective in this category of grant?

Yes (3)

Why or why not? Please be specific and cite evidence from the proposal.

- I believe that this program will be effective because of the pre-existing networks they have in place, specifically the WIOA program and partnering organizations. By drawing on their strengths in this arena, the members who serve as a part of this program will be able to maximize their impact because they can focus on developing specific skills sets and opportunities for economically disadvanted youth, including themselves, as opposed to building the program from the ground up. The program has a history of employing former members in the local area, which further supports that the previous AmeriCorps program achieved one of its desired outcomes – gainfully employing opportunity youth. Additionally, the budget is cost effective, with the applicant proposing to cover 58% of the budget on the local side. The program also has a clear plan for member and supervisor development and support, and has demonstrated that they will adhere to the accountability, compliance, and other requirements of the federal grant.

- There are unclear or confusing parts of this grant, however, in whole, I believe the program has the capacity to place opportunity youth members into jobs, service, or school upon completion of the program, meeting their performance measures. I believe the prior successful performance measures in previous years (of the WIOA program) makes this clear they have a successful track record.

- The program appears to be built on a proven model, and includes an impressive variety of partners and opportunities for service members.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- The evaluation and tracking of the program effectiveness lacked specific details. For example, a draft example of the chart or graph for tracking evidence would be useful. How many members will there be? 35 or 36? Executive Summary says 35, however, Performance Measures stated 36. I also only counted 14 community partners, so I am hoping that the applicant can be more specific in that regard.

- Strong basis and description of need for opportunity youth to have experiences that this program would provide. Wide range of services provided by members at host sites do not all clearly connect to performance measure outcomes. Full body of evidence not presented to support “summer of service” as a key strategy for opportunity youth. WIOA programming pieces not integrated into narrative sections on member experience. Unclear on specifics of evaluation plan.

- How supervision will be accomplished. • How the evaluation will be objective. • More partners were referenced than there were letters of support. Why? • Why 50% post service placement is an appropriate goal.

- Whether members are counted as beneficiaries – the Executive summary is very unclear and the issue is not resolved in the narratives that follow.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- Regarding the program design as detailed in the "theory of change", I am concerned that the 900 hour members will be spending “the first two months…at a Career Center, learning about WIOA and the opportunity youth population.” As written, this implies 2 months of training hours, an estimated 300 hours, which would be 30% of the total service hours. The maximum amount of training hours is 20% of

members' total hours served. The population served appears to be opportunity youth, both as members serving in the program and as clients receiving job training/skill development services. I noted a few points that were confusing; In a description of the WIOA program it refers to the youth being served as individuals 14-24, AmeriCorps requires members to be 17+. Regarding training of supervisors, how will supervisors be trained to support opportunity youth-the target population for the intervention? Concern that in the recruitment section includes recruiting "seniors", outputs/outcome demonstrate that the target population is opportunity youth. Some costs seem high or inappropriate that they are 12 months long, when members are only in service for 6 months (renting van). There is an error in the budget narrative regarding number of members and insurance costs. It's accurate in the actual budget.

- It looks like a great opportunity for participants.

TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:

Program Model

1. The community need is well supported by reference to existing unemployment rates and the dramatic changes being experienced in much of the geographic area to be served with the continued decline of the wood products industry. While it is reasonable to conclude that youth likely face even greater employment issues, no specific data is advanced to address that subgroup as noted in the peer review. I'm assuming that youth were identified as the target at least in part because of WIOA funding from the state dedicated toward that group.

   Program addresses the CNCS focus area of Economic Opportunity and the Maine Priority of tying service to a pathway to employment

   The problem that is identified is broadly shared throughout large areas of Maine.

   The proposed model is basically to use 900 hour members to serve with and support a larger number of 450 hour members – along the lines of a mentor approach? There should be better available evidence than what was provided to support the efficacy of such an approach. Evidence focuses on very limited evaluations of the recovery act youth employment effort. The general model, however, must have been used in other contexts with more in-depth evaluations.

   This proposal does a better job dealing with the client agencies in which members will be placed than their previous application. They've generally managed to show at least some relationship between the work in the agency and the economic opportunity priority, although sometimes it's a stretch (internship per se helping in job readiness). There seems to be a need for greater clarity regarding outcomes for members and outcomes for clients of the various placement agencies. It would be helpful if this was clarified.

   They indicate 50 volunteers will be recruited over 17 sites. Improving volunteer management could be strengthened and perhaps added as a goal? With 450 hours and other time committed to training, may not be possible?

2. The applicant made a good case for program need through their presentation of local unemployment rates, which exceed Maine's average, and by describing the economic dynamics impacting the region. The close integration of the Department of Labor and usage of established curricula like Career Compass shows that there is a structured plan for the program which addresses key employment preparation needs. It would have been nice to have a little more detail about the site-specific activities that members would be engaged in, however, it was generally clear what the focus for each site would be. Although there was limited published evidence, the state evaluation data was compelling. The

program is certainly within the Commission focus area and could potentially be replicated in other parts of the state.

Past Performance

1. EMDC has considerable experience in dealing with federal grant programs and apparently have run a successful VISTA program. I also recognize their strong effort to salvage a failing program that was mismanaged by EMCC.

   One of the strongest elements of the proposal is the use of DOL funds to pay the stipends for the 450 hour members. This greatly improves the local match and cost effectiveness of the program from the National Commission's point of view. They also commit to raising $25,000 locally to support the program.

2. With EMDC's resuscitation of the previous AmeriCorps program, they have certainly shown that they have the ability to understand and meet the requirements of AmeriCorps. Although not AmeriCorps-specific, the organization has a long history of supporting economic development which is relevant to the proposed program.

Financial Plan

1. Match requirement is exceeded.
   Based on staff analysis, the budget has some problems that must be addressed.

2. The budget seems to generally support the plan outlined in the proposal. However, there seem to be a number of calculation errors that should be addressed.

Fiscal Systems

1. With the extent of federal funding EMDC relies on, there should be no problem with accounting and reporting, although I understand there have been issues in the past. I believe the worst of these have been addressed. Financial status of EMDC not all that solid when you consider cash position and take into account permanently restricted assets when evaluating total liabilities..

   Conversely, the extent of federal funding may also be an issue re: financial stability of the organization. I know it has faced severe financial problems in the past, although it now appears these have lessened. I think we need to review the most recent audit to be satisfied that the ship has been righted and will likely remain so for some time.

2. From examining the financial management system survey, the fiscal systems seem to be strong. There have been no recent audit findings, and EMDC has had past successful financial administration of an AmeriCorps program.

Task Force Summary Appraisal

Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective?

Yes (2)

Why or why not? Please be specific and cite evidence from the proposal.
In addition to the organization's previous experience administering an AmeriCorps program, the current proposal has a well-articulated job skills training curricula that provides a strong foundation for program activities. Additionally, the organization maintains key partnership with the State that will further the work.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?
Although the broad focus of member activities at the sites were identified, more detail would have been helpful about specific activities they will engage in.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?
EMDC has really strengthened their proposed program model with a more structured plan for identifying and addressing needed job skills.

Overall:
Much improved over the last program concept that was weak and unfocused. Narrative is poorly written and should be revised and cleaned up. Someone over there needs to take on the role of editor. Same with budget.

Outcomes might be better if broken down by members and clients of placement agencies?