

# Grant Selection Report

**Legal Applicant:** Kennebec Valley Community Action Program/Educare **Program name:** Same (Requirement to include AmeriCorps in name was not followed.)

**Recommendation:** Award funding and AmeriCorps slots at requested levels if applicant makes narrative and budget corrections.

**Reviewers:** Peer Reviewers: Joanna Martel, Mandela Gardner, Madelyn Hennessey  
Grant Task Force: Ed Barrett, Joe Schmidt

**Grant Category:**  Formula  Competitive **Performance Period:**  Year 1  Year 2  Year 3  
 Other Competition  
**Type:**  Operating  Planning **Start/End Date:** [9-01-2019] to [8-31-2019]  
 Fixed Price  Ed Award Only

**ME Priority Area:** School readiness **Fed Priority Area(s):** Education

<b>Request for New Resources</b>	<b>CNCS</b>	<b>Local</b>
<b>New CNCS Funds:</b> \$ 151,920.00	<b>Cost sharing proposed</b> 67%	33%
<b>Match Committed:</b> \$ 75,603.00	<b>Min. Match required</b> 30%	
<b>Total Grant Budget:</b> \$ 227,523.00		
<b>Cost Per Member:</b> \$ 15,192		

	<b>AmeriCorps Member Service Years:</b>					<b>10</b>
	<b>1700</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Service Terms</b>	<b>1700</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Slots with living allowance</b>	5		10			
<b>Education Award only</b>						

**Total prior years with CNCS funding:** [ 0 ]

**Prior experience with CNCS funding:** n/a

**Applicant proposes to deliver services: (select what the applicant states in their application that their program will cover:**

- 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

**Statement of Need (from application narrative):**

Kennebec Valley Community Action Program and Educare Central Maine serve the areas of northern Kennebec and southern Somerset County, where 14.2% and 22% respectively, of children are considered to be living at or below the federal poverty line, with top health concerns in the community ranging from drug and alcohol abuse to depression, mental health and obesity. In the 2018-2019 school year, 61% of the children at Educare Central Maine and its partnership sites, live at or below the federal poverty level.

Mental health is a large concern for many families. Maine has the highest rate of children diagnosed with anxiety and the third highest rate for children diagnosed with depression. The Maine Kids Count Data reports that 56,488 (22.5%) children under 18 have experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences. Resilience is important because it is the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by or even transformed by the adversities of life. With resilience, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs.

A child's ability to form positive responses to Adverse Childhood Experiences depends upon the quantity and quality of protective factors. How parents and other caregivers respond to situations, and how they help a child to respond, separates those adults who promote resilience in their children from those who destroy resilience or send confusing messages that both promote and inhibit resilience. Educare staff is trained to promote resiliency in children and families.

Adverse Childhood Experiences have a tremendous impact on the future violence victimization, perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity, according to the Center for Disease Control. Adverse Childhood Experiences is used to describe all types of abuse, neglect and traumatic experiences that children under 18 years face. The studies around the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences have found links to chronic health conditions, risky health behaviors, low life potential and even early death.

Adverse Childhood Experiences can be generational due to a parent and/or caregiver's lack of understanding of a child's needs and development, the parent and/or caregiver's own history of abuse and/or neglect, substance abuse, young age and/or lack of education. Children in our school, as well as in surrounding partner organizations, typically come into the program with at least one or two Adverse Childhood Experiences. The program's goal for the families and staff is to create an understanding of the challenges and work to create a safe, stable and nurturing relationship between the child, their parents, the teachers and the staff in the schools. These trainings will also help the members to identify their own bias and be able to learn and create a better understanding of the challenges disadvantaged young children and their families face.

**Program Summary (from application):**

Kennebec Valley Community Action Program/Educare Central Maine proposes to have fifteen (15) AmeriCorps members (five (5) full time and ten (10) half time members who will be embedded into over thirty (30) early care and education classrooms at Educare Central Maine, throughout classrooms in our service area and in classrooms operated by our community partners. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for having a better understanding of trauma-informed teaching practices, Adverse Childhood Experiences and be able to support social-emotional development in children. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage a minimum of 200 parents who will be engaged in Conscious Discipline training and Adverse Childhood Experiences awareness. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area(s) of improving school readiness for economically disadvantaged young children. The CNCS investment of \$151,920 will be matched with \$68,275, \$44,275 in public funding and \$16,000 in private funding.

**Identified partners:**

- Maine Resiliency Building Network,
- Family Services Coordinators,
- Public Schools in Kennebec & Somerset counties,
- Educare Central Maine classrooms

Performance Measures	
Do the Service Activity performance measures chosen match the focus area?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Capacity Building performance measures match one of the sets listed in the RFP?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Member Development performance measures exactly match the set provided in the RFP?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

In the next section, reviewers used the following qualitative scoring rubric in their assessment. Each quality level has an associated point value.

**Strong:** This section of the application is a thorough, compelling, and convincing response to criteria; additional information is relevant and enhances or strengthens argument significantly; the argument shows this element shows high levels of success or highly likely to be successful.

**Adequate** This section of the application responds acceptably to all criteria– no omissions or additions. The argument shows this element has had some success or could possibly succeed as described.

**Weak:** This section is below standard or barely responds to the criteria. Some text may not be relevant or does not add to the argument. The argument does not demonstrate this element has succeeded or will could succeed as described

**Incomplete/Substandard:** This section of the application does not respond to the criteria or has significant problems or has a significant flaw or lacks any indication this element could succeed as described.

**SCORING DETAIL**

**I. Summary of Peer Reviewer Consensus Scores**

*(update annually to match CNCS changes in point distribution or organization of narrative)*

CATEGORY with max. points assigned by CNCS	Consensus Assessment	Consensus Score
<b>Rationale &amp; Approach/Program Design Section (50%)</b>		
Need	Adequate	2.68
Theory of Change (Narrative Text) and Logic Model	Adequate	16.08
Evidence tier	Pre-preliminary	1
Evidence quality	Adequate	5.36
Notice Priority	Adequate	2.01
Member Experience	Weak	2.31
<b>Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%</b>		<b>29.44</b>
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	7
Compliance and Accountability	Adequate	5.36
Culture that Values Learning	Adequate	5.36
Member Supervision	Adequate	1.34
<b>Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%</b>		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Adequate	16.75
<b>Data Collection Plan Quality (0)</b>	Incomplete/ Substandard	N/A
<b>Peer Reviewer Consensus TOTAL:</b>		<b>65.25</b> of 100 possible

**Peer Review Recommendation:** Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation

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

Category	Rating	Numeric Score
<b>Program Alignment &amp; Model</b> (15 possible points)	Adequate	10.05
<b>Past Performance</b> (15 possible points)	Adequate	10.05
<b>Financial Plan</b> (10 possible points)	Adequate	6.7
<b>Fiscal Systems</b> (10 possible points)	Strong	10
<b>GTF Review Total:</b>		36.8 of 50 possible

## III. Final Combined Score

<b>Total</b>		102.05 of 150 possible
--------------	--	------------------------

### Final Recommendation of Grant Selection and Performance Task Force:

Award funding and AmeriCorps member slots on the condition that narrative, performance measure, and budget corrections be made before June 28.

### Referenced Conditions/Corrections:

1. The following budget issues must be resolved:
  - a. Described Match does not include full match amount. Match sources and items appear allowable, though the described items listed appear to be different than the match expenditures listed in the budget
  - b. All direct cost budget items calculated correctly. Indirect portion is calculated incorrectly (see below)
  - c. Fringe calculation is correct but narrative is inconsistently presented, with some subtotals but none for health insurance
  - d. Staff Travel and Staff Training include costs for a "National Conference." This is not a required element so the need and purpose for it should be described in narrative
  - e. Calculation for "Training Supplies" offers no detail
  - f. Staff background checks are listed but described as included in Indirect. Indirect Agreement does not describe these costs as included, nor is it apparent that the position created fits into the exceptions in the agreement to listing benefits as direct costs (particularly since the fringe IS listed as a direct cost). There is also a concern that Educare assumes that existing staff background checks meet CNCS requirements.
  - g. A cell phone is listed as cost without explanation of the need
  - h. Member background checks are listed in the Member Support Costs section of the budget
  - i. INDIRECT: No agency share is claimed; no Commission share is calculated. Amount included is significantly higher than the amount of salaries multiplied by the rate presented. 23.5% of \$26000 is \$6110. This is the total indirect available. Of this, \$1598 should be reserved for the Commission and the remaining \$4512 can be claimed by the agency or used as match. The applicant lists more than double this amount in the match column.
2. The following aspects of other application components must be addressed:
  - a. Labor Union Concurrence is inadequate – source of submitted statement is unspecified and has no signature nor dates. Application describes service in multiple local school districts, which are unionized. No concurrence from district unions is provided
  - b. The Organizational Capacity discussion does not address the questions in the RFP directly
  - c. The evaluation plan as presented includes high quality data sources and, again indicates that the program has the intent to boost student achievement, however, the Performance Measures as presented do not align with the evaluation plan
  - d. Description of member activities and supervision needs clarification on several points.

## **PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED**

### **Need**

- **NEED:** There were slight mathematical discrepancies in the numerical demographic data; it was stated that of the 252,634 children in Maine, 35,000 (or 14.2%) live in poverty - however, 35,000 of 252,634 is 13.9%, not 14.2%. In addition, the 14,000 children in living in high-poverty areas would enumerate 5.54% of the total number of children in Maine (which would be rounded to 6%), not 5%. In addition, the narrative explains that Maine has the "highest rate of children diagnosed with anxiety and the third highest rate of children diagnosed with depression," but does not explicitly state the geographic region used for comparison (highest in the U.S., highest in the world, etc).
- I would like to see a more direct statement of the effects of poverty on mental health and brain development. The connections are there, but not as specifically as I have seen in some recent research.
- Data provided was for children under 18 years of age but there is no clarity on the age of students this project would take care of. Therefore, it is not clear that the data related to the project beneficiaries.
- There is more recent research than that cited on the impact of trauma on development. It was not referenced. Is it considered in design?

### **Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model**

- **THEORY OF CHANGE/LOGIC MODEL:** Narrative clearly demonstrated timeline of work (50-week period, 20 or 34+ hours per week depending on position), and outlined the Conscious Discipline model, its positive effects in the classroom and the importance of teaching it to their service members. Explained that the significance of using service members by embedding them into the classroom settings to enhance the number of adults trained in Conscious Discipline and Adverse Childhood Experiences training that the students have access to. The only minor weakness was that there was reference to data from 'a Harvard Graduate School of Education publication' but there was no indication of which publication or volume it was. However, this detail did not detract from my impression of the narrative as strong overall.
- This section was the best constructed narrative in proposal but maintained a 50,000-foot view and did not provide the detail outlined in the selection criteria.
- A lot of narrative was interesting but did not respond to criteria.
- A Harvard publication was referenced but not explained. How is it relevant to this project?
- The text was vague about what members would do. They need to be more than just one more "ed tech" and it needs to be clear they are not displacing anyone.
- The methods used to promote change are clearly articulated.
- "In fact, over half of the now twenty-four Educare Schools across the country utilize Conscious Discipline curriculum Research outcomes for Conscious Discipline include:" This statement is true for the national schools running the curriculum but it is not exactly clear re. measurable outcomes per activities conducted.

### **Evidence**

- The applicant indicated an Evidence Tier of 'Pre-Preliminary.' The Evidence Base narrative included a great deal of information on the dosage and design of the intervention (Teaching Strategies Gold 4x/year, Conscious Discipline Training and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Preschool Program 2x/year, and Pathways interviews conducted by Family Services Coordinators 2x/year) as well as the anticipated outcomes of these interventions moving forward. "Characteristics of the beneficiary population" and "Characteristics of the population delivering the intervention" were not explained in this section.
- The grant claims improvements in programs using the model for trauma-based education but does not cite specific evidence.
- Names of testing vehicles are mentioned with no way to see if these are valid for those not informed in their exact use.

### **Notice Priority**

- The applicant indicated the Education AmeriCorps funding priority, for which it has strong evidence.
- Major points of text include: -The mission of the organization is to enhance school readiness for economically disadvantaged children and children who have faced adverse childhood experiences -The organization's work, as well as the service of the AmeriCorps members, takes place largely within a classroom setting
- Did not address whether the proposed project met basic requirements of AmeriCorps programming.
- I would have liked to see specific citations of the ways in which the program will support school readiness, though it sounds to me like it would do so.

### **Member Experience**

- This section of the narrative described the way that the training their Members will receive will help them relate better with both children and adults recovering from trauma experiences later in life. The narrative also described that the organization intends to construct an inclusive, culturally rich group of members, although it was not explicitly indicated that the program will recruit AmeriCorps members from the geographic or demographic communities in which the programs operate. The 'Member Experience' section of narrative did not explicitly outline Members' opportunities for reflection, although there is mention of 'reflective supervision' elsewhere in the larger narrative.
- The various trainings and classroom experience will enhance the professional qualifications of members who are either educators or pursuing counseling careers.
- Though it is clear that the team members will be from the community they will serve it is not clear how different backgrounds, talents, and capabilities will be tapped for learning and effective service delivery.
- Addressed 50% of the criteria for this section. This should be strong and the basis for recruiting members.
- Training schedule is not clear. Little information about reflection and opportunity for members to integrate learning through reflection.
- A lot of parroting criteria without saying how something (like diversity) would be accomplished.
- Members working with traumatized children will need preparation and support. No acknowledgement that serving this population can, in itself, be traumatizing if not prepared/supported.

### **Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)**

#### **Organizational Background and Staffing**

- There will be an AmeriCorps Coordinator who will be specifically responsible for providing leadership to the AmeriCorps Members and supervision of education implementation, as well as an Education Supervisor who will ensure the implementation of quality teaching practices in conjunction with the AmeriCorps coordinator. In addition to these two positions, the organization possesses a larger team of staff leaders who have all identified trauma-informed teaching practices as a strategic goal for the organization.
- I would have liked to see specific information about the experience and education of the leadership for the program and the AmeriCorps coordinator. They will have major impact on member experiences.

#### **Compliance and Accountability**

- This section of the narrative outlines the network of supervision that works together to keep the AmeriCorps Members compliant and accountable, including an AmeriCorps Coordinator, an Education Supervisor, and a direct supervisor for the AmeriCorps Members. I did not find any "CNCS required evaluation report," though I am not sure if it is applicable in this case.
- Again, I would like to see professional qualifications for member supervisors.
- Use of the word "all" and the statement "understand the rules, expectations, and professional development goals"

#### **Culture that Values Learning**

- This section of the narrative indicates that the organization is already in the process (year two) of Conscious Discipline and Adverse Childhood Experiences training for teachers and staff, and enhancing trauma-informed teaching tools for teachers, staff, parents and children in the classroom setting - indicating that AmeriCorps

members will enter an environment wherein these strategies are already a priority. The narrative also indicates that the organization anticipates that these strategies will only become more necessary as more children with histories of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences reach school age. This section of the narrative did not mention a plan to produce "frequent reports on how well the organization is implementing its programs and strategies," although routine assessments are mentioned in the 'Evidence Base' section.

- I am intrigued by the idea of trauma informed education and can see that having schools with a high number of staff aware of the effects of trauma on learning would be highly beneficial to both students and staff.
- Initial and possible deep training but not showing ongoing or long (multi year) training or use of reporting data to inform ongoing and implementation of programs and/or strategies in p.d.

#### **Member Supervision**

- This section simply indicates that the Members will be assigned to a full time staff member who will ensure that the Members are receiving support and guidance from their supervisors, and that supervisors will also assist in ensuring that the Members receive the training they need to do their job. I am unclear as to whether the "Full time staff member" and the "supervisor" indicated in this section are the same person, or if the supervisory responsibilities are shared in some way between two people.
- Again, I would like to be assured that supervisors for members are effective at supervision. We are dealing with vulnerable students and that creates vulnerable staff.
- AmeriCorps members partnered with full time staff. Ratio numbers are low.
- Section did not build confidence the members would be given adequate and appropriate supervision. If a supervisor is in a building but not accessible, that may be technically okay but would not be effective.

#### **Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)**

- Under 'Source of Funds,' in the Budget Narrative, one description line reads "Supervision, training support for Project Coordinator and members (avg \$50 x 400 hours)" and the total in-kind estimate was listed as \$10,000. This is incorrect - it equals \$20,000. I saw no other errors.
- columns and subtotals not always clear but are accurate, otherwise adequate to all criteria

#### **Section: Evaluation Plan Feedback**

- Both 'Data Plan Content' and 'Evaluation Plan' appear in this application, so I am not sure which category the applicant intends to occupy (although the Face Sheet does indicate that this is a New application). At any rate the section does not appear to include any information on Data Collection or Evaluation plans, and instead rehashes information about the Conscious Discipline model and its benefits.
- The applicant refers to a second year for the grant.
- No sampling methods, measurement tools, and data collection procedures mentioned let alone analysis plans. Though evaluation tools mentioned elsewhere there is no indication that the evaluation data will be, or how it will be used.

**Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? Yes (3)**

#### **Comments:**

- I believe this applicant could be effective in this category. -The organization outlined important data points regarding the pervasiveness of poverty and mental health in Maine's children, and emphasized the role that innovative classroom techniques such as Conscious Discipline model can have on mitigating the effects of these realities on children as they reach school age (see Rationale and Approach/Program Design). -The organization is confident in its ability to manage the projects and goals of 15 (5 full-time, 10 half-time) AmeriCorps members in their organization (see BACKGROUND and STAFFING). -The organization has a demonstrated preexisting investment in the tools and trainings that they are prepared to impart on AmeriCorps members (see CULTURE THAT VALUES LEARNING). -The organization understands the importance of providing AmeriCorps Members with training and tools that will allow them to engage effectively with people facing trauma later in their lives and careers (see MEMBER EXPERIENCE), potentially setting the Members up for a lifetime of continued service to their community.

- The basic plan seems sound, and necessary. That the agency has already trained educators in the Conscious Discipline program and seeks to expand services to the children seems like a positive step.
- Though concerned with the data collection and evaluation the rest of the proposal seems strong and internally structured.

**What elements of the proposal are unclear?**

- -The exact labor force of the organization (the number of teachers and staff members), and the portion of this group that is available to assist the AmeriCorps members -More background on childhood trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences among Maine Children, e.g. the most common types of trauma and their direct effects on learning ability and behavior in the classroom. -The 'Data/Evaluation Plan' section of the application seems to be incomplete.
- I would like more specific information about the qualifications of the people doing the training and supervision of the members.
- Data collection and evaluation.

**What else do you have to say about this proposal?**

- There are a few gaps in information (both narrative and data) that should be expanded upon, but the information that is here is compelling, and I believe an AmeriCorps member who had an interest in child development, psychology, and/or social work in a rural setting would gain a great deal from this experience.
- Could probably pull this off but gaps don't give reader full confidence. Need some key people who will plan out the details and ensure staff have the right skills to implement.
- Felt like they "ran out of gas" when writing the narrative. It is clear they have a passion for the work but how this program would operate (details) are not laid out.
- This seems like a worthwhile program for any school, but especially those schools serving low income/low resource areas. But trauma happens at all economic levels.

**TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:**

**Program Model**

- Aligns well in addressing early childhood school preparedness for economically disadvantaged.
- The program model is not fully developed with applicant devoting significant time on member training and development. Seems to give both member development and community impact fairly equal weight.
- The proposed scale or scope of the program does meet the funding or resource allocation goals of the Commission as stated in the RFP.
- The program model is one permitted under AmeriCorps.
- There are local circumstances that are shared by other communities or regions and, therefore, the program development/success has broader implications or usefulness in Maine.
- Although there are fewer Head Start volunteers than might be anticipated, there is evidence the applicant understands volunteer management and has an organizational commitment to supporting service by volunteers.
- While the need is spelled out to some extent, it could have been stronger if data had been included showing the number of current students served by the program suffering from ACE or other related issues. Generally speaking, the applicant makes frequent references to supporting studies and data without citing the sources/research publications. It appears that the program has been in operation for one year and that this proposals intends to supplement what is already being done by adding an AC member to each of 30 classrooms. So, the intervention is basically providing additional staff with the goal of improving outcomes for children. To measure this, data from the first year would need to be compared with data from the second year. While the measurements to be used are clear, the research design is weak and the expected outcomes are less than might be expected and, to some extent, measuring the wrong thing if the concept is more classroom staff produce better results. I'm also concerned that they only expect to positively impact 160 children. Assuming 10 children per class, that would be a universe of 300, so their goal is only to positively impact just over 50%. How does that compare with the first-year program experience? They should track both the total number of students impacted by the program and the number that show a benefit, and that



should be compared with first year results to see if adding a second staff to each classroom improves outcomes. This is implied but not clearly stated in their research/evaluation proposal.

- It seems like their program model was not fully developed and too much emphasis was placed on AC member skill training and the evaluation tools they will be using.
- This model is nationally renowned.

### **Past Performance**

- This organization has a very strong reputation.
- *Did the grant cited by the applicant require the recipient to follow guidelines or rules with regard to accounting for expenditures and/or linking expenditures to specific activities or outcomes? Is there evidence in financial statements or other documents that the applicant was successful?*  
Yes.
- *Did the cited grant require commitment of local resources (in-kind or cash) as match? Was the applicant required to leverage other resources as part of the grant activity (example: challenge grant)? Was the applicant successful in meeting match or leveraging the resources?*  
Not clear but it probably did.
- *Did the grant require increasing human resources (hiring new staff, recruiting new volunteers or increasing volunteer retention, partnering with students or specific community groups) as part of funded activity? Was the applicant successful? Did the applicant meet targets or goals set in this area? If none required, did the applicant succeed to a degree that resulted in the outcomes of the grant being achieved?*  
Grant cited was Head Start, which is a long-standing program, so what new staff were required was many years ago. At the same time, it is a large program which likely requires considerable HR capabilities. Number of volunteers seems fairly light; however, as a CAP agency, they likely have volunteers in other programs and the necessary systems to support them.
- *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?*  
Yes.
- *Is information in the application narrative for Commission funding consistent with the past performance report, evaluation, and surveys (volunteer practices, readiness, etc.)?*  
To some extent. Could have been stronger.

### **Financial Plan**

- More detailed could be provided, but otherwise clear.
- It is not unusual for a first time applicant to have numerous errors in the proposed budget. Corrections of these errors would move rating to Adequate.
- Some budgeting items are not clear.
- *Expense items in budget are allowable under grant rules*  
Yes
- *Budget narrative has accurate calculations, appropriate detail for calculations, covers activities proposed in application narrative, and expense items are reasonable in light of activities proposed.*  
Numerous errors and omissions require correction.
- *Budget meets or exceeds match requirements and match sources are allowable under CNCS rules*  
Match is adequate but sources are not clearly identified and do not match total amount (grantee share).
- *Match sources are identified with sufficient detail to meet RFP requirements*  
Yes

### **Fiscal Systems**

- Organization has significant experience with grant management and should be able to meet grant accounting requirements.
- This organization (both locally and nationally) has a history of working with grants.

### **Task Force Summary Appraisal**

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

- Yes
- This organization (both locally and nationally) has a strong reputation for being able to deliver this type of product.