

# Grant Selection Process Report

**Legal Applicant:** University of Southern ME **Program name:** Maine Partnership for Environmental Stewardship

**Recommendation:** **Forward or fund with no corrections**

**Reviewers:** David Wihry, Ed Barrett

**Grant Category:**  Formula  **Competitive** **Performance Period:**  Year 1  Year 2  Year 3  
 Other Competition  
 Operating  Planning  
**Type:**  Fixed Price  Ed Award **Start/End Date:** [08/15/17] to [08/14/20]  
 Only  
**ME Priority Area:** [Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity] **Fed Priority Area(s):** [Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity]

<b>Request for New Resources</b>		<b>CNCS</b>	<b>Local</b>
<b>New CNCS Funds:</b>	\$ 177,893.00	<b>Cost sharing proposed</b>	% 64      %36
<b>Match Committed:</b>	\$ 98,851.00	<b>Min. Match required</b>	% 30
<b>Total Grant Budget:</b>	\$ 276,744.00		
<b>Cost Per Member:</b>	\$13,590		

<b>AmeriCorps Member Service Years:</b> 13.09					
	<b>FT</b>	<b>HT</b>	<b>RHT</b>	<b>QT</b>	<b>MT</b>
<b>Slots with living allowance</b>	6	0		6	26
<b>Education Award only</b>					

**Total prior years with CNCS funding:** [ 0 ]  
**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 has a strong history of operating an AmeriCorps VISTA program.
- The AmeriCorps Readiness survey indicates that the organization is both familiar with and has in place the majority of the elements needed for successful management of an AmeriCorps program.
- The applicant indicates that all of the 22 essential volunteer management practices are in place.
- The applicant’s recruitment, enrollment and retention history in their VISTA project are described as excellent; however the target population for VISTA recruitment is very different from the target population described in this application.
- Of note is the organization’s active involvement in ongoing AmeriCorps Technical Assistance meetings.
- Noteworthy also is MCC’s persistent effort in redesigning and improving the grant application continuously over three years, following MCCS recommendations.

**Statement of Need (from application narrative):**  
 [Insert excerpt from the section of the application with same heading; edit to be very brief if necessary]

“Maine grapples with two important challenges:

1. Energy efficiency needs to be significantly enhanced for economic and environmental reasons. As reported in the Maine State Housing Authority's 5-year plan (2010-2014), Maine's building stock is the 5th oldest in the country. Common problems include inadequate weatherization and heating systems. According to Lewiston Sun Journal (10/25/15), a study of single-family homes found that weatherizing could save 62 million gallons of oil/year, about 20% of all the heating oiled burned in

Maine annually. Additionally, Maine Energy Systems reports that our state's greatest source of carbon dioxide emissions is from heating residences. Coupled with our cold climate, there is a vital need for increased energy efficiency. Due to drafty housing and reliance on energy-intensive heating devices, low-income populations often use more energy than their higher income counterparts. On a national level, a 2014 report by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory found that the mean energy burden (a household is energy expense divided by income) for low-income populations was 16.3%, compared to 3.5% for higher income households. Further, the U.S. Green Building Council asserts that energy bills of low-income Americans can comprise 15-50% of their incomes.

To address this challenge, we recognize the underutilized potential for energy efficiency to be practiced throughout Maine. Since Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs struggle to meet existing demand for heating assistance and communities cannot afford the high cost of fuel or its climatological effects, efficiency is critical. MPES will increase energy efficiency and cost savings for economically disadvantaged populations by implementing widespread behavioral and technical energy reduction practices.

2. Young unemployed Mainers need more job skill development opportunities. According to the Maine Department of Labor, as of September 2016, unemployment stands at 4.1%. Better vocational training is needed, particularly for unemployed and economically disadvantaged individuals in growth fields like green jobs. On 11/2/15, the Portland Press Herald documented the lack of trained workers to meet weatherization demand, citing a waiting list of 1,200 homes in Aroostook County alone. The Maine State Department of Labor in their 2010 Report "Counting Green Jobs in Maine" also cited the need for more trained workers for weatherizing Maine homes.

To address the second challenge, we recognize that unemployment is a critical issue in Maine's economy, especially within the 16 to 24-year-old age range. Young, economically disadvantaged individuals will be targeted for the Member positions. By participating in trainings, learning to assess and design interventions for energy efficiency, and attending green jobs career forums, Members will increase their employability in Maine's job market. "

**Program Summary (from application):**

[Insert Executive Summary from opening of application narrative.]

Maine Campus Compact's Maine Partnership for Environmental Stewardship (MPES) initiative proposes that 6 Full Time (FT), 6 Quarter Time (QT), and 26 Minimum Time (MT) AmeriCorps Members (totaling 13.09 MSYs) partner with community organizations and higher education institutions at 6 sites to effect individual behavioral and technical change leading to energy efficiency, particularly for economically disadvantaged individuals and households.

At the end of the first program year, the Members will be responsible for hosting a total of 12 (2 per site) Community Energy Education Events, 12 (2 per site) Window Insert Community Builds (600 interior storm window inserts built and installed into 120 homes), and conducting at least 375 behavioral change Green Certification Audits in homes and campuses. At least 65% of service beneficiaries both in the community and at higher education sites will be economically disadvantaged people, students, or veterans. Members will leverage an additional 96 volunteers to support these community energy efficiency initiatives. All Members will receive skill-building training and will develop an individual career-action plan during their term.

MPES will be implemented over a 3-year period, with much of the capacity building, community outreach and the laying of a solid foundation established during the first year. Each subsequent year will expand the impact of the energy efficiency methods, and systems will be strengthened for measuring energy savings and behavioral changes. In collaboration with community partners and advisory boards, plans will be developed and implemented to sustain service efforts and expand citizen

involvement at each site.

The MPES program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity.

The CNCS investment of \$177,893 will be matched with \$98,851, \$68,025 in public funding and \$30,826 in private funding.

**Identified partners:**

[List partners identified by peer reviewers and task force reviewers

Unity College, Window Dressers, Efficiency Maine, University of Maine Augusta, University of Maine Farmington, University of Maine, EMCC, University of Maine (Machias) and other UMaine System partners referenced in general.

**SCORING DETAIL**

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

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

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>Qualitative Rating</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Rationale &amp; Approach/Program Design Section (50%)</b>		
Need	Strong	0.038
Intervention	Strong	0.56
Theory of Change and Logic Model	Satisfactory	9.5
Evidence Base	Preliminary	6
Notice Priority	Strong	2.25
Member Training	Satisfactory	2
Member Supervision	Satisfactory	1
Member Experience	Strong	2.25
Commitment to AmeriCorps ID	Strong	1.5
<b>Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%</b>		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	7.5
Compliance and Accountability	Strong	11.25
<b>Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%</b>		
Cost Effectiveness	Strong	13.5
Budget Adequacy	Strong	5.25
Evaluation Plan (0 indicates reviewed it)	Strong	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>62.1</b>

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

Category	Rating	Numeric Score
<b>Program Alignment &amp; Model</b> (15 possible points)	Strong	11.25
<b>Past Performance</b> (15 possible points)	Strong	11.25
<b>Financial Plan</b> (10 possible points)	Strong	7.5
<b>Fiscal Systems</b> (10 possible points)	Strong	7.5
<b>GTF Review Total:</b>	<b>37.5</b>	of 50 possible

**III. Final Combined Score**

<b>Total</b>	<b>99.6</b>	of 150 possible
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**Final Assessment of Application:**

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

Please see the comments below.

**Referenced Conditions/Corrections:**

1. list if any

**PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED**

**Program Design**

**Comments: Need**

- Maine’s need for energy efficiency and weatherization improvements was strong and convincing, especially for low-income residents. -Cost is relatively low, certainly compared to purchasing more energy. This is also convincing. -

Need argument could be stronger for job skill development, particularly for “green” job skill development:

1. It is convincing that unemployment for youth is a critical issue, but where are the breakouts for those who are economically disadvantaged and/or other target populations? There is an assumption that this is higher/more needed/worse for those who are economically disadvantaged but is there data to be provided on that?

2. Also, since the focus is on “green” jobs and demand for these, figures/data on “green” or energy-related jobs could be helpful, and this should be provided for the state as a whole, not just one county. There was little provided here, and there is some good, easily accessible data to be had from DOL and others.

- Applicant clearly identifies need in target areas specified – energy efficiency and awareness and economic opportunity (green job skills for economically disadvantaged Mainers) – and uses references from various local publications to support need for programming support in affected communities across the state: “To address the first challenge, we recognize the underutilized potential for energy efficiency to be practiced throughout Maine. “Since Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs struggle to meet existing demand for heating assistance and communities cannot afford the high cost of fuel or its climatological effects, efficiency is critical. MPES will increase energy efficiency and cost savings for economically disadvantaged populations by implementing widespread behavioral and technical energy reduction practices.”  
“To address the second challenge, we recognize that unemployment is a critical issue in Maine's economy, especially within the 16 to 24-year-old age range. High unemployment rates among Maine's young people, according to the Maine Department of Labor (15.1% in 16-19 year-olds; 8.4% in 20-24 year-olds; 5.1% in 25-34 year-olds), prompt us to target young, economically disadvantaged individuals for our Member positions.”  
Applicant indicates how they will ensure they recruit economically disadvantaged young people: “We will prioritize the UMaine system and community colleges where, on some campuses, over 75% of students are eligible for Pell grants.” Applicant’s external media and research references add validity to case for grant, making it more compelling.
- There are 2 demonstrated needs and both are well-supported with evidence and studies, such as poor energy efficiency in Maine and high cost specifically for low-income families of energy.
- There was reference to numerous studies and data sources, including MaineHousing 5 year plan, LSH and PPH articles, the US Green Building Council, and others for demonstrating energy efficiency need. • There was reference to MDOL data for economic opportunity/employment need.
- Parts of argument are strong. Need some indication of whether there are Green Job opportunities in ME.

**Comments: Intervention**

- GC audit piece not that strong in terms of volunteers conducting that intervention and accomplishing the outcomes. When first read through the proposal the intervention description was lost. Not consistently clear on outcomes because they focus on activities. No way of judging how significant the outcomes would be relative to the overall need.

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

- -Member activities, desired outcomes, and roles are relatively clear. -Members seem reasonably likely to be able to contribute to environmental awareness, recruit volunteers, and hold energy events (in collaboration with partners who have specialized knowledge). -Per the needs section, it is indicated that there is a lack of qualified workers to meet the demand for weatherization services. It is less convincing that (in absence of additional information) these AmeriCorps member to be recruited are reasonably likely to be able to fill this need when it comes to the GC audits, particularly with relatively little (1-day for some members, train-the-trainer for others) of technical training and a small amount of consulting support from an external partner. Perhaps there is additional information that was not mentioned here (e.g. are students being recruited out from environmental/weatherization/construction/related programs of study or who have other relevant skills?) -Challenges defining target population: There is a lack of clear, consistent description of target population. "Economically disadvantaged" is often interchanged with "low-income." Some confusing target population references used throughout the section (and the entire proposal include):
  1. Economically disadvantaged: defined as % of member applicants eligible for Pell grants, then interchanged with low-income for households. Other disadvantaged populations are referenced (veterans, nontraditional students). Are these being considered economically disadvantaged as well?
  2. Low-income: described as "% of area below poverty line" in on page 4, by Weatherization Assistance Guidelines on page 6 (household guidelines).
  3. K-12 population is referenced multiple times, including on pages 9 and 24. This is mentioned very briefly. Is it anticipated that some of the sites would be K-12 schools? If so, how does that fit in with the sites being MCC partners (colleges)?
  4. Veterans: will there be specific outreach to this population?
  5. Other target population confusion: "homeowners" on page 5 – is this intentional or will this piece of the project serve only people who own homes? "Homeowners" is then used again on page 6 regarding GC audits, even though other populations are referenced here (e.g. dorms, campus offices). In other places "households" is simply used. This could be clarified.-While some ideas about recruiting economically disadvantaged members were mentioned, there did not seem to be a clear plan for how to go about defining, identifying, and enrolling 50% of members who were economically disadvantaged (particularly if information used is to recruit is non-identifying, p. 3). Is there a ranking of priorities among low-income, disadvantaged, non-traditional?
- Applicant clearly articulates the design, target population, and roles of AmeriCorps members and leveraged volunteers in the narrative text for years 1 -3, with focus on the following 4 key activities that will take place at each of the 6 proposed sites: Community Energy Education Events, Window Insert Community Builds, Green Certification Audits, and Career Build Applicant demonstrates how the 3 tiers (full, part, and minimum time) of members will work together to accomplish goals and effect change. "Splitting their time between the community partner and campus, each FT Member will develop and implement energy action plans with clear outcomes and will lead energy events and community recruitment. The 6 QT Members will be from the community, serving as critical liaisons for recruiting community partners, volunteers, and household participants and helping to lead events and GC audits. An additional 26 MT Members, primarily low-income college students, will help recruit student participants for events, promote MPES and GC on campus and in communities, and connect participants with pre-existing state/local energy conservation resources and incentive opportunities, such as Efficiency Maine." Applicant clearly references how they will make an impact using specific and broad steps and anticipated outcomes. Below is a more generalized impact statement that illustrates the importance of the program: "Without the force multiplier of AmeriCorps, these communities and campuses would not have capacity to raise awareness about energy efficiency in a coordinated fashion nor capacity to implement the activities outlined here." Applicant cites success of their MCC VISTA program model and while this does not add significantly to their argument, it does add weight. Applicant does not provide justification for the

specific number of members, households, or targeted populations they propose, however, they claim to have a buildable model that draws on a community focused approach: “We will use the proven model of our VISTA program, which uses local advisory boards and community partners to engage community members, identify community assets, and set attainable community-based goals” Applicant is addressing two important needs in the state: energy efficiency awareness and action, especially as it pertains to low income community members. The goal is to have the community, members and volunteers becomes self-sufficient in this respect: “Each year, MPES will engage 6 FT, 6 QT and 26 MT Members in community/campus partnerships to: increase individual behavioral change for improved energy efficiency and cost savings particularly for economically disadvantaged individuals, households, and schools; and increase training opportunities/access to resources that improve the economic well-being and career development of the 38 Members.” Logic model incorporates both environmental stewardship and economic opportunity performance measures (3 pages) along with outputs and short and medium outcomes.

- Generally the intervention is well described and suggests that it will likely lead to the outcomes identified. The outcomes are evidence-based. As described, seems that intervention will lead to a significant contribution to this issue, based on lack of resources in Maine and at partner organizations (universities) to address efficiency and green jobs training. However, the outcomes are less clearly articulated for all elements of the intervention. The outputs are very clear. Some outcomes are clear, like the cost savings for inserting windows, but others are missing from the narrative like behavior change specifics or job placement. No rationale present for the stated outputs/outcomes.
- The approach piggybacks on other successful programs. • There is detail on the community events to be pursued, and experience based information (in a later narrative) on the success of similar efforts. • There was cited research that the value of work experience for disadvantaged youth has “short term” benefit; this might be more compelling if there was explanation of why it is only short term (did the evaluation not look at long term data, or do we know the benefits were not long term? If it’s the former, there might be reason to think intervention is valuable. If it’s the latter, I would want to know how they will increase the odds of longer term impact. • This section does not provide a clear link to the evidence based energy efficiency outcomes, or provide information on the extent to which anticipated outcomes would represent meaningful energy efficiency progress given the scope of the need. This may be in part because of the focus on the various activities to be pursued, rather than the results from those activities. I am persuaded from the evidence in a later section, but it was less clear here.
- Didn’t justify the target populations – hard to make connection between need, activities, target. Not clear connection between activities and desired outcomes. Would activities truly result in energy efficiency improvements? As presented, this is hard to determine if this will bend the curve or be a small change. Other piece of concern is defining the target population – definitions varied within narrative. K-12 population referenced but not clear how it would be wrapped in. Same for veterans and homeowners. Couldn’t see who outcomes would effect.

**Comments: Evidence**

- -Is there additional evidence that could be provided for volunteer-run weatherization programs? Some conversations with other AmeriCorps programs were mentioned but their processes/successes were not elaborated upon. The referenced studies did not focus on this type of volunteer-led initiative.  
-The value of light weatherization is convincing, but the researched programs are substantially different from the proposed project.  
-Both studies are 9-10 years old .
- Applicant cites evidence from two studies that support their approach: “Abrahamse, et al. conducted a 2007 randomized control study of 189 households in one city in the Netherlands to investigate the impact of tailored information, goal-setting, and feedback on household energy use over a 5-month period.”  
“After 4 months, experimental households reduced their direct energy use by 8.3%, compared to a .4% energy increase by the control group. Significant changes in 9 out of 15 energy related behaviors were also

tracked in the experimental group in areas such as thermostat level and hot water usage. Due to the online educational component of the intervention, the experimental group also displayed an increase of energy conservation knowledge levels.”

Applicant submitted this study because it supports the idea that educating people, specifically regarding behavior changes, about energy efficiency is cost effective and reduces energy costs over time. It seems logical to assume that the straightforward nature of this approach draws on the strengths/idea behind AmeriCorps service generally, as well as the concept of effecting change from the bottom up by first changing behaviors of individuals and households. Although not within the recommended time period (study was completed in 2007), the study’s findings still apply directly to the applicant’s approach.

Applicant’s second submitted study targets low income individuals: “2007 study of low-income energy efficiency programs (Drakos, et al.), which evaluated assessment methods and energy savings for 10 initiatives across 7 states. The study found that successful programs shared similar characteristics and could easily be combined with technical weatherization measures.” Applicant proposes to build on the argument made in this article by combining energy education with hands on weatherization, which is a more concrete approach with lasting results. Applicant proposes to use similar assessment techniques to the ones referenced in this article. Applicant proposes to replicate models similar to those suggested in both studies through their CG audit (previously referenced as being an effective method of energy conservation tracking that is used at Bates College). Although this study is also older (2007), it proposes a series of best practices that the applicant seems to be drawing from heavily, such as community education, low cost measures with immediate impact, and holding information sessions for community groups. See below: “MPES will implement best practices in behavioral and technical interventions from these models and leverage higher education institutions to meet serious environmental and economic community needs” Applicant references additional studies that enhance their overall argument: “American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (Sussman and Chicumbo, 2016), the authors present evidence from programs that advance behavioral change through feedback/reward systems, along with public commitments to energy reduction.” Applicant proposes to utilize the “energy champion” model used in other programs, whereby enthusiastic individuals (in our case, the QT Members) lead small groups through energy efficiency goals.” “MPES will also adopt the suggested assessment techniques of surveys/engineering estimates in tracking savings, since billing analyses have been found to be difficult to implement with low-income homeowners.” Economic opportunity target area: applicant does not provide detailed analyses, instead they provide generalized summaries of what they hope to achieve based on experience of similar AmeriCorps programs across the country and data available at the state and federal level: Additional supporting information from this section that support their case included the following: “We assert that job skills developed by our Members and the population served will lead to a more qualified workforce for green jobs in Maine. We observe the successes of the weatherization programs in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was the 7th most effective job creator out of 200 programs. The Maine Department of Labor predicted that full-time energy auditor jobs in the state would increase by 55 between 2010 and 2015, and that weatherization technician jobs would increase by 118.”

- The applicant has described and included with their application a study that examined a comparable intervention. (Though, the study describes only 1 element of the applicant’s multi-faceted approach in their theory of change). Their description of the study is thorough and includes most of the required elements, it is missing a description providing details of the data or the strength of the findings. The study is compelling in its findings and close match of the intervention to the applicant’s intervention of CG audits, however, the study took place over a decade ago and focused on a very different target population (upper middle class Dutch residents in a small city). The applicant also goes onto describe some of the body of evidence including studies and reports that support the other facets of their intervention, like studies that look at low-income energy efficiency programs, window inserts. They also have consulted with AmeriCorps programs in other states that have implemented similar models, though none have completed scientific evaluations of their work.

- Quantitative estimates of energy savings/outcomes are provided; the narrative cited ACEEE and Drakos reviews of behavior based efficiency programs. • Commitment to replicating audit interventions that were proven successful in the Netherlands.

**Comments: Notice Priority**

- -The project aligns well with the economic opportunity and environmental stewardship areas. The focus on employment in the “green jobs” sector also does a good job of weaving these two priorities into a coherent focus.
- Applicant’s priority areas meet both the federal and state funding priorities of economic opportunity (CNCS) and the environment (CNCS) and environmental stewardship (MCCS). Additional comments in this section do not necessarily enhance the argument; instead the applicant simply summarizes the goals of the proposed program.
- The applicant claims to be under 2 priority focus areas, however, the “environmental stewardship” focus area is specific to 21st Century Conservation Corps. This cohort is pre-existing, and Maine Campus Compact is not a part of it. The 21st Century Conservation Corps has a specific focus on protecting and improving public land and increasing access, NOT on energy efficiency. The proposal does however fit into economic opportunity-opportunity youth, with a focus on economically disadvantaged college students receiving job training, professional development, and being placed in green jobs after service ends.
- Clearly articulated links to both environmental stewardship and economic opportunity for opportunity youth. • It was less clear how through this project members will be trained for “green jobs”, a claim that was made in this section.

**Comments: Member Training**

- -The organization has experience running AmeriCorps programs and it is convincing that they will be able to provide education on prohibited activities, volunteer recruitment, etc. -Unity College will provide a very valuable role in assisting with career planning and this sounds like a strong opportunity for members. -1 day of the 3-day training seems insufficient to provide technical training for GC audits AND community event planning/workshops (unless members are already skilled/experienced in these areas) -More explanation is needed for how training will be provided to the MT members who may not be attending the initial 3-day training. Page 11 simply states that “FT and QT members will transfer much of their knowledge to MT members.” Is there a formal process for how this knowledge transfer will occur? -Will there be safety training? There are a lot of opportunities in this program for safety issues to occur with members or their volunteers (e.g. in-home visits, tools, light construction at workshops, transporting a significant number of supplies). Given the project’s intended scope, this would seem to be a very important component that is currently lacking.
- Applicant addresses what will be discussed at the proposed member trainings but does not discuss prohibited activities. Members will have an opportunity to attend a 3 day orientation and additional trainings thereafter. “Additionally, 4 in-person trainings will be held for FT Members to enhance technical expertise, community engagement, and best practice sharing. QT and MT Members will have 2 in-person trainings and 4 virtual trainings focused on issues such as MPES recruitment, efficiency counseling, and technical assistance coaching.” “Training topics will include AmeriCorps policies; campus-community collaborations; poverty and behavioral factors in energy efficiency; organizing and leading community energy events; GC audits/online tool training and technical training related to window inserts; leadership development; volunteer management; outreach; sensitivity training; job searching/preparation, with particular attention to “green” jobs; and program assessment.” Of note is the “train the trainer” approach being used, in which information that the full and quarter time members learn will trickle down

to the minimum time members, as opposed to giving the latter their own training. Cost effective method that also teaches valuable skills. Applicant describes how the career development training will be done by an outside partner – Unity College.

- The training plan includes many key elements like knowledge of AmeriCorps policies, technical training to support program goals, and job search training.
- There was a list of the various training to be provided and it is clear there will be training about the rules around prohibited activities. • The quality of the training is less clear -- why we can expect it to be successful. • It was unclear from the narrative why Unity College is strong for their part of the training (some of this comes through in their letter of support, and the narrative would be stronger with a reference to their unique strengths).
- Is train-the-trainer formal? How will knowledge transfer occur? Some of training is specialized and that is a lot of members unless they already have skills. One day of training not enough.

**Comments: Member Supervision**

- Organization has experience managing AC programs and understands the supervision involved; proposed plans for group meetings appear adequate. -Host sites will receive training and will have some funding for supervision – it is convincing that this will assist with accountable supervision. -It is not clear what the program director and program coordinator will do to “oversee” the 38 members. Who will do the site visits? What are their roles? Who will be day-to-day contact? Since neither one is full time on this project, how will coverage be negotiated? -There are many levels of “supervision” here, from FT members assisting MT members to host sites, partners, coordinator, director and the ED. Since the org chart does not address this program specifically and just lists MCC on one line, it would be helpful to explain these lines of accountability in more detail.
- Applicant outlines supervisory model and the time commitments of the Program Director, Program Manager, and Maine Campus Contact Executive Director. Supervisors will be trained on how to supervise AmeriCorps members. “Supervisors will provide excellent support through ongoing check-ins and weekly meetings with Members. The Program Director and Program Coordinator will also provide ongoing support to the Members and site supervisors. There will be quarterly phone check-ins and 2 formal in person compliance reviews per year at each service site, conducted by MCC Staff with Members, site supervisors, and community partners.” Applicant was not clear as to how they would ensure that supervisors would adhere to AmeriCorps and program regulations, priorities, and expectations and only alluded to it by saying “This supervision structure will ensure that projects meet identified goals and address any issues of concern to ensure that program requirements are followed.”
- Thorough plan to support supervisors and members at host sites in Maine.
- Information on the position that would supervise and the means of supervision was provided. • There was little context though for why the supervisors are capable or why this level of supervision will be effective.
- Org chart does not show where program is within the organization. There are lots of levels of potential supervisors. Executive Director and Program Director are both part time on the project. Could not find detail on how supervision would flow. Who is providing the “high quality” supervision and support.

**Comments: Member Experience**

- Professional development for members is a big focus of the program. Connections with partners and career assistance are huge and make this project special. -3-day initial training would foster peer connections and help build relationships between members. -Intent is to recruit members who are economically disadvantaged (though there could be a bit more clarification on how this will be determined)

- Applicant has solid plan in place to ensure that the member experience is supported and leads to making plans beyond a member's year of service. Focus will be on how the member's current year of service relates to their goals/career aspirations. Applicant will offer a variety of platforms for members to connect with each other, reflect on their service, and plan for the future: "Five in-person meetings will be held for FT Members (and 2 in-person trainings for QT and MT Members) including hands on training and reflection. Members will participate in a group service project to fulfill the dual goals of training and reinforcing an ethic of service. Members will have a virtual platform as a resource-sharing forum and opportunities to connect with other National Service Members at the Blaine House and Maine AmeriCorps Conferences." Applicant has identified multiple groups for recruitment including economically disadvantaged youth and veterans from "employment offices, social service agencies, veterans' groups, and organizations to recruit from each host community. Our goal is to have a minimum of 50% QT and MT Members be economically disadvantaged individuals."
- Thorough description of professional career planning resources, reflection activities, group service projects, and recruitment strategies.
- • Unity College resources will be used for career counseling, commitment to providing opportunities for reflection and the broader service network. (It would be stronger if the narrative were to describe why Unity College is particularly well suited to provide counseling to members interested in jobs related to environmental stewardship.) • There is commitment to a minimum level of recruitment of economically disadvantaged individuals. • The link to how the skills gained will be relevant to future employers was not clearly made. It referred to training in weatherization techniques but it is not clear what was meant by that or what the training involves.
- Why will skills gained be relevant to future employers? What is the case?

**Comments: Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification**

- Strong plan for branding and marketing -Initial multi-day training important to share AmeriCorps history and purpose -Organizational experience with managing AmeriCorps programs makes this commitment convincing and likely to start up quickly.
- Applicant has stated that members will be identified as such during service, and that partners will also have AmeriCorps logos on their materials. Members will be taught the elevator pitch and given a history of the AmeriCorps program during orientation.
- Excellent plan to make AmeriCorps members known in community, including basic tasks like wearing gear and educating members, but also going beyond and conducting outreach in the community.
- Commitment to media release, social media mentions were the reason for strong, though it felt like a stretch; I would have been more comfortable with that rating if more detail was provided. • Elevator speech and logowear/logo use will ensure identification with re AmeriCorps.

**Organizational Capability Comments**

**Comments Organizational Background and Staffing**

- -Strong letters of interest from the most critical community partners mentioned in the RFP -Per previous sections, there could be more clarification of this specific program's org chart, specifically responsibilities of program director vs. program coordinator and how coverage for these part-time roles would be negotiated. -AmeriCorps experience, strong network of MCC members, experience managing multi-site programs in these areas.
- Applicant has a history of success and strong organizational support within the targeted communities as is evidenced by the following statement: "MCC has a long history of federal grant administration through our AmeriCorps VISTA program. MCC has been awarded VISTA grants and successfully hosted VISTAs since

1998." Applicant has demonstrated success with managing federal grants, specifically a "\$150,000 grant from the U.S. EPA Environmental Education Sub-Grants program, through which MCC awarded 19 \$5,000 sub-grants to college/university faculty teams across 3 states to embed environmental community projects into courses." The success with this grant led to "Davis Educational Foundation to expand the reach of the model to 18 additional campuses throughout New England. In 2015, the EPA awarded MCC renewed funding to develop campus-community environmental projects with community colleges, with the aim of engaging low-income students to address critical environmental issues." Applicant has identified community partners. The partners who submitted letters are specific and tailored to this grant application and cover all the requirements (what the partner(s) see as 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) Applicant included additional information about their AmeriCorps VISTA program operations, however, this does not add significantly to the argument.

- Strong track record of AmeriCorps program management, and environmental projects at college campuses. Organization is experienced (20+ years); has experienced staff and plans to recruit an additional qualified individual; and commitment from partner organizations to offer support.
- Clear articulation of organizational strength, and detail provided on staff experience and capabilities. • Existing campus and community partnership. • Clear commitment to oversight, including fiscal oversight

#### **Comments Compliance and Accountability**

- Strong experience managing AmeriCorps programs with high enrollment and retention. -Site visit and host site supervisor training to convey important compliance information -Clear plan for addressing risks of non-compliance.
- Applicant has strong track record with VISTA program and argues that this approach will help guarantee the success of their AmeriCorps program: "The MCC AmeriCorps VISTA program has achieved a 100% enrollment rate since its inception in 1998. Retention rates are above 95%." Applicant uses proven model to ensure compliance and accountability "required orientation session with all site supervisors that conveys AmeriCorps requirements and prohibited activities; a Memorandum of Agreement articulating the responsibilities of MCC and the host site; an On Site Orientation form submitted by the site supervisor to the Program Director, which ensures that each Member understands site expectations, and bi-annual site visits with the Members, site supervisor, and occasional community partner." Applicant has plan in place to address issues of non-compliance.
- The applicant has a track record that demonstrates a plan for prevention of non-compliance at host sites, intervention, and corrective action plans if needed.
- High MCC enrollment/good track record with comparable program. • Commitment to continuous evaluation. • Formal MOU with relevant commitment. • A proven monitoring process.

#### **Cost Effectiveness & Budget Adequacy Comments**

##### **Comments Cost Effectiveness**

- Overall, budget reasonably aligned with narrative and sufficient to carry out proposed activities. It is below maximum cost per member year. -However, will there be member travel to home sites for GC audits? Where is this captured? -Truck rentals for window kits mentioned – are there any storage costs that should be included given the high volume of supplies? -Criminal background checks for staff (2): Aren't there 3 staff members? ED, Program Director, and Program Coordinator? Also, should there be buffer here for any host site supervisor or staff transition?
- Applicant's budget is sufficient and well-reasoned: "The MPES program is highly cost effective in several regards: 1) our cost per MSY is \$250 below the maximum allowed; 2) we leverage significant and diverse

non-federal resources that demonstrate community buy-in and build towards sustainability, as well as demonstrate sound balance of federal and non-federal sources; 3) our match in the first-year meets the 30% required amount, and comes from both cash and in-kind sources; and 4) we build upon existing program models and resources to maximize cost-effectiveness.” Applicant does require cost share from partner sites hosting members, further relieving the burden on CNCS: “The MPES program design requires \$2,800 cost share in financial support from each of our 6 host sites. The \$16,800 from the 6 sites combined ensures investment in the program and will allow us to offset Member travel and training costs.” Every element in the budget has a specific purpose, is supported by evidence, and has outcomes that justify the expense.

- Yes, budget is aligned with program narrative. Budget is cost effective and describes way to raise match, including through in-kind resources and cost share.
- Significant leveraging of nonfederal resources. • Reference to proven success with Window Inserts. • Experience base that justifies budget/resource/estimates. • Match is higher than it needs to be.
- First time quarter time and minimum time members were education award members only. It may not have been asked for but the fact it is clear this late raises questions about recruitment and other issues.
- Member travel question – could not find expense for travel of members to houses. Mentioned a truck rental for kits – are there storage needs? Criminal background for staff only covers 2 staff but Executive Director is on the budget so that would make 3 people. What are the per diem rates referenced?

#### **Comments Budget Adequacy**

- Line item information in the narrative is provided in a clear way. -Costs are allowable and reasonable and broken down by CNCS/non-CNCS -Per diem rates – per the GSA shouldn’t these be at \$51/day and not \$46/day?
- Applicant provided strong, error free proposed budget: 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 in the budget narrative: Identify the non-CNCS funding and resources necessary to support the project. Applicant clearly identifies roles of those responsible for the budget: “Overall administration of the grant, and administration of Members, will be managed at MCC, and will be adequately staffed by a 40% time Program Director, 40% Program Coordinator, and 20% of the MCC Executive Director's time.”
- Yes, budget appears to meet expectations of instructions.
- Reference to past experience to justify program cost estimates was persuasive. • Funding sources are clear.

#### **Evaluation Plan Comments (for 3-year grant period)**

- Strong qualifications of program evaluator, particularly given very reasonable budget -Proposed research design with pre- and post- tests, experimental and control groups -One potential weakness: will the timeline allow enough time to collect employment information about members at 6-mo/one year given the reporting requirements of the grant?
- Applicant utilized outside expert to conduct evaluations at the end of each program year: “MCC will also conduct a rigorous program evaluation based on outcomes. MCC will use the services of our evaluation expert, Dr. Georgia Nigro from the Bates College Psychology Department to design these surveys and pre- and post- tests.” Applicant clearly identifies theory of change and expected outcomes: “MPES AmeriCorps Members will work with community partners, institutions of higher education, and

economically disadvantaged households to implement evidence based and informed behavioral and technical interventions to increase energy efficiency.” “Key outcomes of this intervention include increased awareness about technical and behavioral approaches to energy efficiency (short term); reduced energy use through measurable behavioral change practices and technical adaptations such as window inserts (medium term); and cost savings realized by economically disadvantaged households and institutions across Maine (long term).” CNCS outputs and outcomes are referenced specifically and individually. Applicant shows continuity and ability to track progress with plans for each evaluation each year, culminating with a year 3 comprehensive evaluation that will build upon the previous two years: “Each year, an evaluation report will be prepared which will include results from the surveys and pre/post tests, along with compiled data from stakeholder surveys (community partners, supervisors, Members), and Member reports, site visits, and a member alumni survey. The evaluation results from these annual reports will be used to inform each subsequent year of the three year program.” Qualifications of the evaluator and the estimated budget are also included.

- Mostly thorough description of performance measurement, deeper evaluation including a control group, and an identified evaluation partner. The description of study components and the estimated budget less clear.
- Refers to best practices from the past MCC work. • Outcome based evaluation. • Access to trained/experienced evaluator. • Clear articulation of what would be evaluated.
- Noted there is an error on page 16. The CNCS name for the performance measure is wrong. They cite an Environmental Stewardship performance measure (EN 2-green jobs) but elsewhere in the grant and in the performance measure they use O1 and O-38925.

#### **Peer Review Summary Appraisal**

***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 (4)

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

- Overall I do think this applicant would be successful given strong community partnerships, organizational capacity, and some pieces of the proposed design. The professional development benefits to the members are extensive and well woven into the framework of the project.
- This program falls into two key focus areas and has a clear vision, timeline, and expected outcome for each of the focus areas. This fact, coupled with their continued success with their AmeriCorps VISTA program, is a strong indicator of the success if they are awarded funding. "MPES will be implemented over a 3-year period, with much of the capacity building, community outreach and the laying of a solid foundation established during the first year. Each subsequent year will expand the impact of the energy efficiency methods, and systems will be strengthened for measuring energy savings and behavioral changes. In collaboration with community partners and advisory boards, plans will be developed and implemented to sustain service efforts and expand citizen involvement at each site." "MPES will increase energy efficiency and cost savings for economically disadvantaged populations by implementing widespread behavioral and technical energy reduction practices." "To recruit Members, we will collaborate with campus partners, and economically disadvantaged status will be determined through non-identifying statistics provided by registrars' offices (i.e., the % of Member applicants Pell grant eligible). By participating in trainings, learning to assess and design interventions for energy efficiency, and attending green jobs career forums, Members will increase their employability in Maine's job market."
- This is an experienced organization that hosts a successful AmeriCorps program. They have clear outcome goals, with specific and detailed intervention plan. They have an efficient model that draws in resources from host sites and other partners.

- I believe the applicant would be successful, because of the well documented need, the information provided in the evidence base and the strength and resources of the applicant.

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

- The potential success of the GC audits appears to be the weakest activity listed in the proposal, given the limited training for the members and volunteers. The proposal provides little information on other similar programs that have used volunteers in this type of capacity. The target population/eligibility is unclear and needs further refinement and better data could be provided on the need, target population, potential members, and growth of "green jobs."
- The proposed priority focus area (economic opportunity-youth opportunity job placement) is less thoroughly explored in the evidence base. The other focus area, environmental stewardship, is not a priority focus area.
- The outcomes" listed in the executive summary, and in other places are activities and events – whereas the outcomes should be the results of the activities and events (e.g. what was actually accomplished in terms of behavior change and improved energy efficiency.) • This same issue arises is the theory of change narrative and elsewhere. There is a list of the activities, but not detail on the number of people they expect to reach through the activities, and how specifically they will engage participants at those events to make the events a success. Not all events are created equal. • There was mention in the narrative of "behavior change" as a result of the interventions, but little information in the narrative on what specifically those behaviors were and how specifically they would change – with the exception of the window inserts, that piece was persuasive. • All that said, my ratings were "satisfactory" because the evidence base provided had documented energy savings, and the matrix of performance measure and the evaluation plan refer to outcomes, so taken as a whole, the application provided, at least at a minimal level, the necessary information –though not always in the relevant narrative.

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

- In one section of the narrative (evaluation), the applicant refers to the "green jobs" PM under the focus area of environmental stewardship, and NOT the chosen economic opportunity PM. This is confusing. In the member training section, there is a reference to a "train the trainer model" for FT/QT to MT members. I would be somewhat concerned that the program staff rely on FT and QT members to train MT members. Some knowledge and skills are so critical that they must be directly trained by qualified trainers or program staff-in particular AmeriCorps policies and restrictions. In the member supervision section, there is a reference to FT/QT members providing "key support" to MT members. I have questions about what this means. Supervision duties are not appropriate for any AmeriCorps members. Clear boundaries must be set. Members may provide leadership and peer support, but should not have the administrative duties of supervision of other members. I did not realize until I reached the budget portion that the model called for "education award only" members for MT and QT. This probably should have been laid out clearly in the "theory of change"-description of intervention/design.
- This sounds like a great project. A clear articulation of desired outcomes at all levels will help make it a success.

**TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:**

**Program Model**

- Energy costs are a significant issue for low-income Maine resident home-owners due to the relatively high percentage of income that goes to this expense category. This is aggravated by the general age of

buildings in Maine. Buildings in Maine also contribute a significant percentage of greenhouse gases emitted in the state both due to the reliance on fuel oil and inefficiency of older structures.

Environmental stewardship is a CNCS focus area. A lesser focus on economic opportunity also addresses a CNCS topic -- promoting economic opportunity of those engaged in such activities.

Third time around, the proposal continues to improve as the emphasis grows on efforts to support low income community members rather than colleges and universities. In the past, I've been skeptical regarding the long-term effect of behavioral education on energy conservation and am much more supportive of structural fixes such as insulation, more efficient heating systems; energy conserving appliances, etc. While preliminary evidence is presented that behavioral changes can occur, it is limited and does not address the long-term. While it is possible that short term behavior changes (perhaps in part because folks are being followed-up on to study effectiveness – Hawthorne effect?), there is no evidence of long term success. Are the savings documented in the studies continuing into the future once life returns to normal.

I also appreciate that the proposal now provides greater emphasis on involving regional and statewide organizations focused on energy efficiency in the effort. Efficiency Maine and local/regional weatherization organizations offer a variety of programs that could go beyond simple window inserts into more significant building modifications. Unfortunately, most low income residents don't have the time or knowledge to seek out these programs or handle the applications and coordination. Educating and working with the target clients in this area could potentially magnify the impact significantly.

Some comments on the secondary emphasis on economic opportunity. It appears that members will largely be recruited from campuses. I would suggest that as much care as possible be taken to recruit members who might actually look to make a career in this area. Six members achieving employment seems a bit low, although it is recognized that many of the members will be college students with delayed employment goals.

Goal of 96 volunteers. Should be feasible given the commitment of various schools to voluntary community engagement.

- The program models identified in the research cited and the program model presented in the proposal were only comparable in a general sense. However, in terms of developing a program that supports increased efficiencies, the applicant made a good case that the audits/WindowDressers and other elements can help lead to positive energy efficiency outcomes. The employment preparation element seems to be a secondary piece of the model, but the program doesn't overstate the expected outcomes of this. The dual impact on members and the community is evident through the energy efficiency work and job market preparation. The applicant made a compelling case for the need to address energy efficiency and employment challenges in the state. The evaluation was detailed and should provide valuable evidence about program effectiveness.

### **Past Performance**

- MCA clearly has experience in dealing with federal and state funding and how grants must be managed and reported. This is shown by the success of the VISTA program. Match requirements are met.
- Campus Compact seems to have a great track record through their work with the VISTA program and they seem to have excelled at meeting program requirements in the past.

### **Financial Plan**

- Match requirement is met and I am pleased to see that some of it will be in cash from participating sites. This should result in some buy-in support.
- The financial plan looks to support the work that is outlined in the proposal. There were no major issues with the budget.

### **Fiscal Systems**

- Organization seems to have the necessary organizational policies and procedures in place to manage the grant and meet reporting requirements. Seems like it is also in reasonable financial condition.
- The organization has a strong history of federal grants management and has managed VISTAS in the past. The financial management systems survey indicated their systems are strong.

### **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.***

- Please see the comments above.

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

- The indirect cost rate calculation needs to be clarified.

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

I really didn't like their application the first time around, but it has improved with each subsequent iteration. I appreciate that they took our prior comments and suggestions to heart, particularly by moving away from an on-campus focus to a focus in the wider community. While I remain skeptical re: long-term behavioral changes, I'm willing to give it a try, particularly if the organization makes sure that clients are made aware of other, more systemic, energy conservation programs and are assisted in applying for them – such as local/regional weatherization programs and the property assessed clean energy program of Efficiency Maine.

It's clear the organization took our comments over the last two rounds seriously and made appropriate changes. It's also clear that they have thought out how they will go about evaluating their program – although I'd like to see a two or three year after the fact evaluation to see if the "changes" really took.