

MAINE RURAL AMERICORPS GRANT REVIEW (12/2018)

Task Force Final Recommendation:	Fund with requirement corrections and clarifications be made.
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RFP Due Date: 11/30/2018

Project Name: AmeriCorps Formula: Skowhegan
Outdoor Recreation Action Plan

Application Number : 19CAC209930

Project Contact: Kristina Cannon

Legal Applicant: Main Street Skowhegan

MSYs and Slots requested: 2 MSYs; 2 slots @ 1700 hours

Grant Type: Cost reimbursement
 Fixed Amount
 Education Award Only

Budget Proposed
 CNCS funds \$30,745
 Local Match \$57,409
 Cost per Members \$15,373

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

Outdoor Sports Institute, Skowhegan Trails Collaborative, Run of the River Committee, Skowhegan Fitness Task Force

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

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Within a single municipality | <input type="checkbox"/> Within a single County but not covering the entire County |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County-wide in a single County | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Counties but not Statewide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statewide | |

Which CNCS focus area does this applicant identify as related to its proposal?

Focus Area Identified	Activities are within list of acceptable for funding
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Healthy Futures	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic Opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Veterans and Military Families	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Executive Summary

Main Street Skowhegan proposes to have two AmeriCorps members who will coordinate and execute no-cost outdoor recreation programming designed to increase physical activity and engagement with nature for local community members in Skowhegan, Maine. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for increasing participation rates in outdoor recreation programming by four percent (344 people). In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 25 volunteers who will lead community outdoor recreation programming. This program will concentrate on the Healthy Futures Focus Area. The CNCS investment of \$29,864 will be matched with \$55,000 in private funding.

Health statistics for Somerset County show more than a third of adults and 17 percent of teens are obese. In a recent Community Health Needs Assessment, Somerset ranked 15th out of Maine's 16 counties in health outcomes and dead last for quality of life. Somerset County also has the highest poverty rate of all 16 Maine counties.

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

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: H4A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 344

OUTCOME: H18: Number of individuals reporting a change in behavior or intent to change behavior

Proposed target: 172

OUTCOME: H19: Number of individuals with improved health

Proposed target: 1031

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT – NOT ENTERED

CAPACITY BUILDING – NOT ENTERED

Scoring Detail:

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

CATEGORY	Qualitative Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need (5)	Adequate	3.35
Intervention (8)	Strong	8
Theory of Change, Evidence, and Logic Model (8)	Adequate	5.36
Work Plan Year 1 (8)	Strong	8
Notice Priority (1)	Adequate	0.67
Member training (6)	Strong	6
Member supervision (5)	Adequate	3.35
Member Experience (5)	Adequate	3.35
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identity (3)	Strong	3
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing (10)	Strong	10
Compliance and Accountability (15)	Weak	4.95
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25)	Adequate	16.75
TOTAL		72.78
60-79, Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation		

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

	Score
Program Model	100.05
Past Performance	10.05
Financial Plan	3.3
Fiscal Systems	6.7
Total Task Force Score	30.1
Peer Review Score	72.78
Final Score for Applicant	102.88 of 150 potential

Final Assessment of Application:

- Fund application with no corrections/modifications
- Fund if corrections/modifications can be negotiated
- Do not fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- Fiscal system needs strengthening so applicant can handle federal dollars in compliant way and not end up with penalties.
- Missing performance measures need to be added.
- Service activity performance measure for 1,000+ people needs to be reassessed. Extrapolation not permitted and cannot be attributed to program.
- Weaknesses and issues noted by reviewers in comments that follow need to be addressed.
- Develop and add to proposal the program logic model. (Applicants were directed to not submit this and plan for working with MCCS staff to develop/enter it if selected for award.)

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Section: Program Design (50 %)

Note: CNCS has subdivided this part of the narrative into 5 parts. The comments indicate the part and follow the narrative outline in the RFP.

Need

- Specific to Skowhegan and immediate surrounding area - Data OK- 15th out of 16 in health outcome in county
- Incorporates local health data, and how the AmeriCorps member will leverage existing (and pending) infrastructure to address the issues
- The need was identified using a strategic planning meeting with 500 community members. Health statistics on obesity were also provided.

Intervention

- Well defined plan each step well defined by who and expected outcome and who is responsible
- Thorough, detailed, and multifaceted.
- All assessment criteria were answered, but they didn't specifically answer the intensity.

Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model

- The Skowhegan OSI set goals of incremental of 4% increase in community participation limited to Skowhegan and surrounding area. Goals were from prior knowledge of community demographics

- Standard outcomes and targets, with research and particular mention on why AmeriCorps is needed.
- Goals are clearly stated for the program. Evidence was provided in support of the effectiveness of such a program. The question of how the members add significantly was not clearly answered. The internal capacity question was answered from a high view, when more specifics are needed. It seems as though they have a plan but most of it is in their head.

Evidence

- Only adequate- could have referenced and listed better references
- Two sources in the short paragraph of information presented.
- Argument for impact was shallow.

Work Plan for Year One

- Well documented plan/description of what success looks like and responsibilities
- Detailed schedule complete with responsibilities and intended outcomes
- There is a distinct plan for the year.

Notice Priority

- Healthy Futures focus based on providing opportunities to increase physical activity, reducing weight through this additional activity and related disease reduction
- The focus area is Healthy Futures and they have reviewed and understand all of the regulatory requirements.

Member Training

- This is really marked between adequate and strong. Supervision will delivery the majority of the training along with partners for the specialized training relating specifically to the project. Supervisors would introduce members to the community as AmeriCorp.
- Training for the role in addition to further professional development
- The proposal indicates a commitment to providing all training necessary for the members to succeed. Much of the training will be done by their partner, OSI. Members will have access to demonstrations of programming to be offered, and will have access to further training materials from OSI.

Member Experience

- Members will have other opportunities to interact with the community beside just MSS. Members will learn how to collaborate, they will learn teamwork, customer service and gain experience on planning, marketing and communication.
- Each component of the RFP was addressed for member experience expectations
- Members will be given time for reflection with their supervisor and community stakeholders. Reflection will include a personal component as well as a programmatic one. Members will gain experience in community organizing, teaching, coaching, and outdoor recreation. Ample opportunity is present in the area for additional meaningful service. Days of service for Sept 11 and MLK Day of Service will be planned. There was no mention of connecting the members to the broader AmeriCorps network.

Member Supervision

- The ED will be the Supervisor and meet weekly with the members where the program results and opportunities would be reviewed
- Members will meet weekly with their supervisor to discuss the program and any needs they have.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- MSS will provide AmeriCorp logo Clothing and will provide a separate office just fr the members with the AmeriCorp on the door. The will be introduced to community members and town officials
- Proposal mentions ensuring the community understands what AmeriCorps is
- Members will receive gear that they are to wear each day to the office and out in the community when performing their service. The logo will be on their office door and wall.

Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)

Organizational Background and Staffing

- MSS has a strong Staff with 3 permanent members plus a part timer. all have strengths that can add tom the members experience. Along with that the program has great financial support
- Demonstrates prior success in managing new projects and has strong staff.
- The organization has been in existence for 13 years and has significantly increased its staffing and funding in the past 3 years. They have the support of the Town, as well as several partner organizations and the community at large. Volunteerism is strong within the organization.

Compliance and Accountability

- There was an adequate description of the financial compliance methods- they will post what is allowed and what is not allowed for AmeriCorps participation
- Organization mentions some safeguards and that they will complain.
- Are the internal checks and balances actually board approved written policies and procedures? While they are making a concerted effort to maintain compliance and accountability, written policies and procedures to that effect will safeguard the organization itself.

Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)

- Budget is ample for the program to be run effectively and is designed to operate efficiently. However the program is over the \$/MSY
- Detailed and reasonable.
- Cost per MY is above the threshold of the grant requirements.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL 1. 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:

- Strong plan - the program provides a solution to area obesity, However you can bring a horse to water...
- Strongly organized proposal that articulates how an AmeriCorps member will connect residents to resources
- They have very strong support from the community and several strong partners, as well as the resources from the OSI.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- Why the \$/MSY are greater than the allowable?
- None.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- Good program for the community.
- It is a decent proposal, but I would feel much better about it if their compliance and accountability section were stronger.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

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

The priority addressed is Healthy Futures with an intervention designed to increase outdoor activity to reduce obesity and improve heat. Documentation of need includes data on the percentage of adults and teens that meet the definition of obese, the County's ranking of 15th out of 16 for health outcomes, and last in quality of life. These are adequate indicators of need although a more in-depth analysis might result in better data to be used for specifically targeted programs. Health and obesity are clearly significant statewide issues that need to be addressed. The goal of the program is to increase the percentage of Skowhegan's population engaged in outdoor activities by 20% over 5 years. One comment is that the program they are proposing appears to have a potential for impact beyond Skowhegan's boundaries, so this may be a misleading goal. More data on the effect of increased outdoor activity on health outcomes would have been nice.

The focus is primarily on external impact on those who participate in programs as shown through participant data and hopefully at some point (although not clearly presented in the proposal), some population wide data on health outcomes/obesity. There is also an element of organizational capacity related to developing volunteers to work in the outdoor recreation area and to improve the organization's volunteer management practices. I believe that the staff review commented that a stronger emphasis on developing organizational capability might have been appropriate as perhaps even the major focus of the grant narrative. While I think the capacity building element of the application could be strengthened, I'm not necessarily supportive of making that the major focus of the program. It also appears that what they are attempting to do here is within the capability of the organization and the funding requested.

Does the proposed scale or scope of the program meet the funding or resource allocation goals of the Commission (geographic, population sector, etc.) that were stated in the RFP?

Yes, although I think they will have and perhaps should have indicated they will have a more regional impact.

Is the program model one that is permitted under AmeriCorps? (youth corps, team, dispersed site, etc.) Yes

Are there local circumstances that are shared by other communities or regions and, therefore, program development/success has broader implications or usefulness in Maine?

Yes, although perhaps within a broader context. See comments below.

Is there evidence the applicant understands volunteer management and has an organizational commitment to supporting service by volunteers? Does the readiness survey section on volunteer management indicate the organization is prepared to engage volunteers? If the organization is just starting to implement volunteer management, are there other indicators in the readiness assessment that point to likely support for volunteer engagement?

Yes. The organization has a considerable number of volunteers that are essential to its operation/success and understands their importance, how to make use of them, and the need to further improve its volunteer management practices. To a certain extent, this application, with some success, is attempting to fit a square peg into a round hole. Reading between the lines, I would intuit that the outdoor recreation effort in Skowhegan was initiated and is supported more as an economic development project than a health and wellness one. Developing tourism and recreational opportunities is one of the frequently adopted approaches that communities have taken to improve their economies. Given the presence of the Kennebec and the forest land referenced in the application near to the center of Skowhegan, I'm sure this effort is seen more as economic development than tourism. Health and Wellness, while likely an important subsidiary outcome, is probably seen as less important in the grand plan. At the same time, I have to complement them for their creativity in building an application that addresses a priority. I also cannot say that it does not, because it does.

- The program overall is strong. I assessed the program alignment and model as incomplete because one required part was not included (Member Development Measure). I think this program has high potential to have an impact on a community, though I agree with the peer review comment of "You can lead a horse to water...". This program could be a good pilot to try something out and see how many "horses drink the water" or to refine the program to find out "what flavor water the horses like". I think

the measuring aspect of this program would be difficult (a weigh in at the beginning of the program and a weigh out at the end seems difficult to get by in on). Perhaps a survey tool of some type may be more effective.

Past Performance

- Not a requirement in the submission, so I'm not sure on how to treat this category. The grant example submitted was for a very small grant that is not comparable in complexity and requirements to one from CNCS.
- The organization seems to have a strong history of volunteer management (many public events), and grant management (looking at the number of organizations granting money to MSS in their 990). Though it does appear they need more experience in measuring outcomes to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs. It also appears that they will have the capability of managing federal funds in compliance with the federal standards.

Financial Plan

- Once again, we have the typical errors we always see in applications. However, the 44 week first year time frame is wrong throwing off some other calculations and the per member cost exceeds the maximum.
- The financial plan contains errors in the calculations of the stipend and indirect cost. The use of terms like "living wage" can be philosophically problematic to the way AmeriCorp Members are compensated (stipend vs. wage). The cost/member ratio is above the allowed amount. They also use "estimated" costs which are not allowed.

Fiscal Systems

- The organization seems to have a reasonable balance sheet and to be capable of tracking its revenues and expenses appropriately. I would note, however, that it is likely to need some substantial training and hand holding to handle an AmeriCorps grant
- This organization definitely has the capacity and the means to deliver this program fiscally. Their cash flow is strong, they will easily be able to do the match, and they have the support of their community and multiple organizations. The insight of the potential mislabelling of administrative payroll vs. programmatic payroll was helpful and insightful. Correcting this would bring the actual programmatic expense / total expense ratio into better focus and a more favorable light.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL

1. *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

- See comments above. Organization appears to have a good plan in place, has strong community support and partnerships, and a small but capable staff.
- Do to the broad community support and success of their current programs, I feel MSS will be able to leverage that community awareness and success to implement this program successfully. They definitely have the fiscal ability to ensure that the program succeeds and the extra capacity of two AmeriCorp Volunteers I think will be helpful in them piloting a new program that will better their community.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- The proposal focuses only on Skowhegan residents where it will clearly provide a potential benefit to a much larger region and may also fit in well with the community's economic development goals.
- The Financial Plan needs to be more clear. I have yet to see a proposal that has either been complete or adequate in this standard.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

Nothing.