

Award Justification Statement
RFA# 202303050 Maine Rural State
AmeriCorps Grants

I. **Summary:** Volunteer Maine, the state service commission, awards *grants* of federal AmeriCorps program resources to community-based agencies (public and nonprofit). This RFP solicited proposals from organizations that had never received an AmeriCorps grant and would recruit a small number of participants (between 2 and 5 FTEs). The grant period is three (3) years with 12-month annual budget periods serving as the basis for adding funds. Programs serving rural areas were a priority along with programs that addressed community issues related to public health, workforce development, housing, climate action, or community resilience.

II. **Evaluation Process**

The Commission uses selection criteria and a process that incorporates the mandatory AmeriCorps weighting and scoring of various criteria published in the Code of Federal Regulations as well as Commission policies on funding and performance, and the requirements of state contract selection rules.

All AmeriCorps Planning Grant proposals are assessed by the Commission's Grant Selection and Performance Task Force using a two-phase process. The text that follows is quoted from pp 18 and 19 of the RFA.

Phase One. Peer Review of application narrative, budget, and performance measure components using federally required scoring system. Reviewers are community service practitioners, educators, administrators, and specialists in the areas of environment, public safety, education, and other human needs who evaluate the quality of the proposals.

Volunteer Maine uses the mandated AmeriCorps weighting and selection criteria during this phase: 50% for Program Design, 25% for Organizational Capability, and 25% for Budget Adequacy and Cost Effectiveness for a possible total score of 100 Peer Reviewer points.

Peer Reviewers express their consensus recommendations to the Commissions' Grant Selection and Performance Task Force by assigning each proposal to one of the following categories:

- ◆ Strongly Recommend for Further Review (A comprehensive and thorough proposal of exceptional merit with numerous strengths; total score between 90 and 100)
- ◆ Recommend for Further Review (A proposal that demonstrates overall competence and is worthy of support; it has some weaknesses. Total score between 80 and 89)
- ◆ Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation (A proposal with approximately equal strengths and weaknesses. Total score between 60 and 79.)
- ◆ Do Not Recommend for Further Review (A proposal with serious shortcomings. There are numerous weaknesses and few strengths. Total score 59 or below)

Applications not recommended for further review will be excluded from consideration in Phase Two process.

Phase Two: Applications recommended for some level of review will undergo further assessment by the Grants Selection and Performance Task Force. The Task Force will include in its review documents submitted as part of this competition plus data from publicly available information systems including SAM (the federal System for Award Management).

It also will consider information gathered in a structured interview of representatives of the grant applicant. The representatives must include the proposed project director plus personnel responsible for finances and human resources. The interview will be conducted through remote technology and recorded. Task Force members will review the recording as part of their assessment tasks.

The Task Force will use the following weighting and selection criteria during this phase: 25 points Funding Priority Alignment, 10 points Program Model, 15 points Commission Preferences (rural, partnerships, marginalized communities), 10 points Financial Plan, 15 points Fiscal Systems, 10 points Past Performance, and 15 points for Grant Readiness for a possible total of 100 points.

Upon completion of the Task Force review, the scores from Phase One and Phase Two will be combined to produce a single review score. The Grant Selection and Performance Task Force then makes its final recommendations to the full Maine Commission. Proposals that address Commission priorities and preferences will be considered first for awards. If there are sufficient funds remaining, proposals in other categories will be considered.

III. Qualifications & Experience. (RFA pp 17-18) Applicants must operate an AmeriCorps program only in Maine. Eligible types of organizations are public or private non-profits, State/county/local units of government, higher ed institutions, faith-based organizations, labor organizations, federally recognized Tribes, and regional organizations. All applicants must have an existing physical presence in the community where AmeriCorps members will serve. Organizations must have an official IRS employer identification number. Applicants will need to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier with the federal System for Award Management and have an active registration. Only organizations that have never been awarded an AmeriCorps grant may apply. Agencies that have hosted AmeriCorps members but not had fiscal responsibility for the program are eligible. Applicants serving any rural region may submit proposals, but preference points will be given to applicants in counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum. Those counties are Franklin, Hancock, Oxford, Somerset, Waldo, Aroostook, Knox, Washington, Lincoln, and Piscataquis. **NOT ELIGIBLE:** Organizations that have been convicted of a federal crime are disqualified from receiving assistance under an AmeriCorps grant. Pursuant to the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, an organization described in Sections 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 26 USC 501(c)(4), which engages in lobbying activities is not eligible to apply.

IV. Proposed Services. Operate the AmeriCorps program approved in the application for up to three years.

V. Cost Proposal. (RFA pg 14) This grant program awards a flat amount per 1700 hours of service by AmeriCorps members. The amount for this competition was \$28,800 per 1700 hours.

VI. Conclusion. The sole proposal submitted addressed the RFA priority for mental health and was deemed to have met the criteria for funding eligibility.

Crofton, Maryalice

From: Crofton, Maryalice
Sent: Wednesday, June 21, 2023 2:00 PM
To: Smyth, Julie A
Subject: Formal Award Notification
Attachments: AwardNotificationLetter-MDOE.pdf

Please see the attached letter.

In addition, please be aware that the federal AmeriCorps agency's award of funds to cover the grant is being delayed significantly by implementation of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. This is wholly unexpected and impacts the ability of the Commission to finalize the award document (Cooperative Agreement) with you. We will share any information as it becomes available. Current predictions are a minimum 1 month delay. Fingers crossed!

Maryalice Crofton

Executive Director, Volunteer Maine
Maine Commission for Community Service
A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism

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Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service
A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism



June 21, 2023

Julie A. Smyth
Maine Department of Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0023

SUBJECT: Notice of Conditional Grant Award(s) under RFA # 202303050, Maine Rural State AmeriCorps Grants

Dear Ms Smyth:

This letter is in regard to the subject Request for Applications (RFA), issued by the State of Maine, Commission for Community Service, for Maine Rural State AmeriCorps Grants. The Commission evaluated the proposal received using the evaluation criteria identified in the RFA, and the Commission is hereby announcing its conditional grant award(s) to the following applicants:

- Maine Department of Education

The applicant listed above received the evaluation team's highest ranking(s). The Commission will be contacting the aforementioned applicant soon to negotiate the final award. As provided in the RFA, the Notice of Conditional Contract Award is subject to execution of a written contract and, as a result, this Notice does NOT constitute the formation of a contract between the Commission and the apparent successful vendor. The vendor shall not acquire any legal or equitable rights relative to the grant resources until a grant containing terms and conditions acceptable to the Commission is executed. The Commission further reserves the right to cancel this Notice of Conditional Contract Award at any time prior to the execution of a written contract.

As stated in the RFA, following announcement of this award decision, all submissions in response to the RFA are considered public records available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA). 1 M.R.S. §§ 401 et seq.; 5 M.R.S. § 1825-B (6).

This award decision is conditioned upon final approval by the State Procurement Review Committee and the successful negotiation of a grant agreement. A Statement of Appeal Rights has been provided with this letter; see following page.

Thank you for your interest in developing an AmeriCorps program to serve the needs of Maine people.

Sincerely,

Maryalice Crofton
Executive Director



Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service
A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism



STATEMENT OF APPEAL RIGHTS

Any person aggrieved by an award decision may request an appeal hearing. The request must be made to the Director of the Bureau of General Services, in writing, within 15 days of notification of the contract award as provided in 5 M.R.S. § 1825-E (2) and the Rules of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Bureau of General Services, Division of Purchases, Chapter 120, § (2) (2).

RFP # 202202015
 Planning Grants

Applicant Sheet 1

Applicant Sheet 2

Application ID 23ES256624
 Applicant Name Maine Department of Education

Peer Reviewer Results

Program Design	32	
Organizational Capability	21	
Cost Effectiveness/Budget Adequacy	12.5	
Peer Review Final Score	65.5	0
Recommendation to Grants TF	60-79, Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation	

Task Force Review Results

Proposal Alignment and Model	25	
Program Model	5.625	
Preferences from RFP	3.75	
Past Performance	7.5	
Financial Plan	7.5	
Fiscal Systems	13.75	
Grant Readiness	11.25	
Task Force Final Score	74.375	0

Final Application Score	139.875	0
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Funding Requested 141,120

Rank order for funding (high to low) 1

Peer Reviewers -- Consensus Process Worksheet

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 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 responds to many but not all the required elements/criteria. Some text is not relevant or does not add to the argument. The argument does not demonstrate this element has succeeded or would succeed as described
Substandard	This section barely responds to the criteria, has a significant flaw, or lacks any indication this element could succeed as described.
Incomplete/Nonresponsive	This section of the application does not respond to the criteria.

APP ID: 23ES256624 PROGRAM NAME: Maine AmeriCorps Mentors for Success
 APPLICANT NAME: Maine Department of Education

INITIAL
 COMMENTS: [LINK TO DOC](#)
 FUNDS REQUESTED: \$137,200

After peer reviewers discuss the proposal contents, quality, and responsiveness to requirements, record the group's consensus rating in column G for each section in the cells below. (Select from drop-down menu.)

RATER -- Initial ratings					Consensus Rating	Point Value
Program Design	Pamela Proulx-Curry	Dr Tiffany North				
Need and Target Community(ies)	Adequate	Substandard			Weak	3.5
Intervention	Strong	Weak			Adequate	6
Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model	Adequate	Weak			Weak	7.5
Funding Priority and Preferences	Strong	Adequate			Adequate	3
Member Training	Adequate	Adequate			Adequate	3
Member Supervision	Strong	Adequate			Adequate	3
Member Experience	Strong	Adequate			Adequate	3
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification	Adequate	Adequate			Adequate	3
Program Design Score						32

RATER -- Initial Ratings					Consensus Rating	Point Value
Organizational Capability	Pamela Proulx-Curry	Dr Tiffany North				
Organizational Background & Staffing	Strong	Adequate			Strong	12
Compliance and Accountability	Strong	Weak			Adequate	9
Org. Capability Score						21

RATER -- Initial ratings					Consensus Rating	Point Value
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Pamela Proulx-Curry	Dr Tiffany North				
	Adequate	Adequate			Weak	12.5
Cost and Budget Score						12.5

FINAL SECTION TOTALS and RECOMMENDATION

	Program Design	Organizational Capability	Cost Effectiveness/ Budget Adequacy		Total Score
Final Consensus Score	32	21	12.5		65.5

Recommendation: **60-79, Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation**

Grant Task Force Tech Reivew and Assessment Section

INITIAL RATINGS> Below are the initial ratings offered by GTF Members after their independent reading and assessment of the proposals. These are the starting points for your determination of a final rating of the application narrative.

LINK TO COMMENTS

		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Proposal Alignment (25%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
Alignment with Funding Priorities		Adequate	Strong	Strong	25
				Section Score	25
		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Program Model (10%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)		Adequate	Incomplete/Nonresponsive	Incomplete/Nonrespons	0
Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically and geographically diverse		Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	1.875
Potential for innovation and/or replication		Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	1.875
Strength of evidence implementation processs will succeed		Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	1.875
				Section Score	5.625
		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Preferences from RFP Announcement (15%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together		Weak	Adequate	Weak	3.75
serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum		Substandard	Incomplete/Nonresponsive	Incomplete/Nonrespons	0
				Section Score	3.75
		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Past Performance (10%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
Prior Grant management experience		Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	7.5
				Section Score	7.5
		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Financial Plan (15%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
		Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	7.5
				Section Score	7.5
		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Fiscal Systems (15%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements		Strong	Strong	Strong	5
strength of the sponsoring organization's financial management		Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	3.75
strength of the sponsoring organization's financial status/stability		Strong	Adequate	Strong	5
				Section Score	13.75
		Rater -- initial ratings			
		Becky Hayes Boober	Ed Barrett		
Grant Readiness (15%)				Consensus rating	Point Value
		Strong	Adequate	Adequate	11.25
				Section Score	11.25

GTF Total Score: 74.375
 Peer Reviewer Score 65.5
Combined Score 139.875
 of possible 200

*lookup pre-programmed

Recommendation: Fund only if corrections can be negotiated

Grant Proposal Report to Commission from Task Force

Recommendation: Fund only if corrections can be negotiated and conditions met.

Legal Applicant: ME Dept of Education

Program Name: AmeriCorps Mentors for Success

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

- Type:** Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area: Education

Local Share Required: Yes No

- Applicant type:** New (no prior AC experience)
 Re-compete (# of yrs: __)

Proposed Dates: 8/15/23 to 8/14/24
Submitted request is for Yr 1

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

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	137,200		n/a
Member Support	n/a		n/a
Indirect (Admin)	n/a		n/a
CNCS Award amount	\$137,200	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	n/a
% sharing proposed	100%		n/a
% share required	100%		n/a
Cost-per-member proposed	\$ 28,000		
max allowed	\$28,800		

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 4.9

	Slot Types Requested						
	1700	1200	900	675	450	300	Total
Slots With living allowance		7					7
Slots with only ed award							

Program Description (executive summary):

The Office of School and Student Supports within the Maine Department of Education proposes to have seven AmeriCorps members who will act as Success Coaches for at-risk high school students in 3 rural school districts in southern Maine (RSU 60, RSU 06, and RSU 55). At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps program will have improved mental health and increased academic performance for students served. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage approximately an additional 18 student volunteers who will be engaged in near-peer mentoring of elementary and middle school students in their districts. This program will concentrate on the focus area of Education.* The AmeriCorps investment of \$137,200 will leverage \$74,450 in public funding and \$0 in private funding.

Service locations:

- RSU 60 (Berwick, North Berwick, and Lebanon)
- RSU 06 (Buxton, Hollis, Limington, Standish and Frye Island)
- RSU 55 (Baldwin, Cornish, Hiram, Parsonsfield, Porter)

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

The 3 school districts

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

Applicant proposes to deliver services:

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

Does the proposal fall in a Commission funding priority? Yes No NA

If yes, which one?

- Public Health – including domestic violence, abuse or neglect, substance use, emergency preparedness/response, adverse childhood experiences, and mental health
 Workforce development – combining service with skill development or certifications that lead to post-service employment
 Housing – affordable and safe housing; home energy conservation, weatherization, or repair including programs that perform the modifications, teach homeowners DIY skills, or help residents connect with programs that offer financial assistance to accomplish the projects
 Climate action compatible with *Maine Won't Wait* (the state climate action plan) and Maine Climate Corps
 Environmental/community resilience, adaptation, and sustainability including emergency preparedness.

Do the Service Activity performance measures chosen match the focus area? Yes No

Do the Capacity Building performance measures match one of the sets listed in the RFA? Yes No

Do the Member Development performance measures exactly match the set in the RFA? Yes No

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

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 105

OUTCOME: ED27C: Number of students with improved academic engagement or social-emotional skills

Proposed target: 105

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Not entered

CAPACITY BUILDING

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

Proposed target: 3

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

Proposed target: 3

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	Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need	Weak	3.5
Intervention	Adequate	6
Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model	Weak	7.5
Funding Priority and Preferences	Adequate	3
Member Training	Adequate	3
Member Supervision	Adequate	3
Member Experience	Adequate	3
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification	Adequate	3
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	12
Compliance and Accountability	Adequate	9
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Weak	12.5
	Total	65.5
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.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Proposal Alignment (25%)		
Alignment with Funding Priorities	Strong	25
Program Model (10%)		
Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)	Incomplete/ Nonresponsive	0
Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse	Adequate	1.875
Potential for innovation and/or replication	Adequate	1.875
Strength of evidence implementation process will succeed	Adequate	1.875
Preferences from RFA (15%)		
From a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together	Weak	3.75
serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum	Incomplete/ Nonresponsive	0
Past Performance (10%)		
Prior Grant management experience	Adequate	7.5
Financial Plan (15%)		
Fiscal Systems (15%)		
Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements	Strong	5
Strength of orgz financial mgt practices as evidenced by audits, etc.	Adequate	3.75
Strength of sponsor orgs financial status/stability	Strong	5
Grant Readiness (15%)		
	Adequate	11.25

Total Task Force Score	74.375
Peer Review Score	65.5
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)	139.875

Final Assessment of Application:

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

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

The following proposal issues need to be clarified or, in the case of missing required elements, added.

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities related to supervision and programmatic details (implementation fidelity) between DOE and school districts.
- Need letters of commitment from the school districts. Letter needs to identify the local supervisor. Also, since intent is to use MIYHS to show progress toward goals, those school districts need to commit to participating in the survey in 2025, agree to share pertinent data points for school district for purpose of eval.
- Need union concurrences.
- Outcome performance targets must be set. Only outputs are in the proposal.
- Must have a dedicated program director position. Dividing it among existing staff 1) is not what was in grant proposal but was detail in interview; and 2) will end up with very uneven results/performance.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

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

Need

- Need is described in detail and well documented. Documented that program is in a rural area. Describes a broad advisory group that was used to build the proposal - description is not specific and it is not clear if intended recipients of service were included in the planning.
- As per the applicant the three school districts that are to be served (RSU 60, RSU 06 and RSU 55) state the definition of rural according to the US census as it is not in an urban area. The applicant describes a mental health crisis for teenagers as well as a lack of professional staff as their proposed need. The data used to support the mental health crisis stems from a 2021 survey that supports decline in mental health as of 2019. This data does not use any comparison data from other states or deciphers any variables such as race, sex or socio-economic status. It is also unclear how this data is directly tied to the three-school districts as the data is not specific to the schools but to Maine as a whole. Additionally, it is unclear how this survey was conducted or how students who were impacted by mental health were surveyed and in what capacity it was done, by parents, teachers, in the school etc. and how many participants are reflected in the data. Without this information it is very difficult to generalize and say there is a mental health crisis. The community at large is not detailed and it is unclear about the demographics of the community at large being served.
- The other identified need of shortage of teachers is slightly supported by the fact that the applicant states that Maine rates mirror the national rates on teacher retention and that “teacher turnover and retention rates are on par or slight better than the national average” (page 3). The applicant has identified that this has been exasperated by the pandemic which has impacted school worldwide. The applicant has not made a specific connection to teacher shortages on the community and in these schools as well as the impact of this on other outcomes, such as educational gains and outcomes, community outcomes etc. There is also no mention of demographics or if there was a concern before the pandemic that impacted teacher retention and shortage in this community.

- Additionally for the teacher shortages, an advisory board was formed to conduct surveys from a variety of sources. No surveys were done with local colleges, universities etc. or nearby teaching programs or if there any which could impact this area. Also, there is no mention of any racial disparities in any of the needed areas.
- Finally, there are existing planning and engagement efforts in place for mental health within the school itself such as counseling etc. and mentoring connection, there is no mention of community-based organizations or parent engagement and support. Also, there are statewide initiatives for teacher shortages but not at a community or local level and how recruiting from similar backgrounds of the students might be helpful.

Intervention

- Detailed description of AC positions & activities including a sample workweek schedule. Good description of how AC member will interact with others.
- The applicant selected a model meant for an urban population and supplanted it on a rural population. Not sure how that model that is meant for a different demographics, different populations would be implemented with fidelity. Not sure the core activities or the duration would have an impact because it has not been proven for this population or type of community.
- There is a paucity of rural models so maybe this is an opportunity to take the model and test it but there was no discussion/recognition of this. Could have discussed why this urban model was selected for use in such a different setting or why they didn't develop a homegrown one to test.
- This applicant would likely have done better in a presentation because this applicant probably could explain themselves better verbally than was done in writing.
- The applicant describes that it will utilize AmeriCorps members as Success Coaches in the identified school districts to “mentor and provide academic support for at risk students, recruit high school mentors to volunteer with elementary and middle school students, and partners with school staff to add capacity.” Even though this gives a general description of the population it is not clear how they were picked and what criteria were used. On a weekly basis the coaches have 10-15 hours of direct service meetings with students but the intervention itself is not clearly defined. Another area states that out of the cohort of 10-15 members they will meet with them once a week for at least 60 minutes. This needs further clarity regarding the hours per week and what activities will actually take place. It is also unclear how the students will be selected to be mentors considering they are also experiencing mental health concerns as per the applicant. Another intervention of members adding capacity to the school includes advocacy and mentoring youth to be peer mentor; as well as supporting school staff with mutual interests. This does not detail the level of intensity needed for the application or what the interventions specifically entail. A draft weekly schedule is outlined averaging a 26.5 weekly schedule. As this is a first-year grant it is important that the applicant shows intervention that have measurable improvement as well as the demographics it is impacting. This area is not detailed enough to be able to determine if the program is implemented with fidelity across school sites or the impact of the intended outcome. The applicant did, however, outline the requirements for the AmeriCorps position and their roles and tasks. The applicant aligns the AmeriCorps members with ELO Coordinators (this should be detailed as there is an assumption of what this position entails) to expand learning opportunities for high school students. It would be helpful if the applicant would add a deeper or direct connection to local universities and community volunteers to help make the program more sustainable. It is also unclear how if any community volunteers, parents or other external stakeholders are involved or benefit as a whole. The applicant did not make a clear connection to mental health interventions and any connections to outside resources to assist if any mental health crisis occurs or connection with mental health counselor at the respective schools

Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model

- Uses well developed model. The logic model and criteria are not strong, so they are not likely to get the kind of information from what they are planning on measuring to prove the model or not.

- There is a lack of connection between inputs, activities, and outcomes. The logic model fell apart – they went to outcomes. There’s nothing measurable under outcomes. It goes to outputs.
- It is unclear the extent to which participants of the national service program are recruited among residents of the communities as. In the logic model presented, the applicant outlines the problem of mental health; however, it fails to make the connection with the inputs, activities as well as the outcomes. In this case the items associated with the problem of “Maine state research data shows that school age kids in Maine are struggling with mental health related issues, and the recent pandemic exacerbated this problem: are all associated with academics and only on the high school population versus a younger population which would have an earlier and longer term of impact on mental health. It would be better defined and clarified if the mental health and academic goals were separated and there were academic gains showed with data by grade level for subject The applicant did not make a clear connection to the target population for the intervention i.e. youth with mental health concerns or academic deficiencies. There is an identification process by the school for students to participate but it does not clearly define how students are selected to participate and what is assessed as a result of this. There is not enough of a school partner connection to show great impact.
- It is also unclear why this particular intervention is the best fit for the identified community need which is not clearly defined. The model has been adapted from a urban setting to a rural setting therefore having different demographics and audiences.
- The volunteers are used appropriately in regard to hours and dosages however it is unclear of the match with staff members as it based in mutual interest. Additionally, the activities and outputs for workforce development are not clearly defined to ensure a connection to the outputs and outcomes. The matching criteria are unclear, and outcomes are not clearly defined to ensure success.
- It is also unclear when the intervention will occur in the schools that are identified and specifically where.
- The last problem identified by the application in the area of volunteers does not include parent and community engagement and it is unclear how this will impact the community as only mental health and academic gains are noted but no specifications on dosages or percentages.

Evidence of Effectiveness

- Evidence is very good, though not from peer-reviewed study.
- The applicant cited several existing AmeriCorps programs that they researched to base their pilot program on. The concern is that the applicant utilized the City Year program which is based on urban schools. The demographics that the population serves, and the needs of the community may not be necessary in tune with what the pilot program in rural schools is attempting to achieve. The applicant also even identified concerns to this model used -not only demographics, housing, resources, cost etc. making it more difficult to implement this program without “extra effort, creativity, and flexibility”. The applicant must make adaptations to the model which takes away from its fidelity and no longer makes it valid. It is unclear of the direct impact of this model on the population to be served. Additionally, the applicant is assessing the number of students with imputed academic engagement or social emotional skills by the participation in the program itself and not by any identifiable goals or gains.

Funding Priority and Preferences

- Meets two of Commission's funding priorities. It is rural communities but not meeting the preference based on RUCA codes.
- The applicant addresses two of the five funding areas. The applicant addresses Public Health which covers mental health and also states workforce development which the grant states is “combining service with skill development or certifications that lead to post-service employment. “Even though workforce development is addressed there is still an unclear connection from the activities to the outcomes.

- The applicant has demonstrated that they are in Maine by the school districts and details described and fall into all the criteria needed to qualify. As per the guidelines established the applicant also falls into the rural category.

Member Training

- How many days constitutes multi-day training? Hard to evaluate what realistically could be delivered without that number. What you can accomplish in “multi-day” varies by how long it really is.
- The applicant identifies multi day training for its members but does not detail hat this training entails and how there is a connection to understanding the community. The applicant does not state that the members get volunteer training, providing citizenship and civic engagement opportunities as we as assisting with transition to Life After AmeriCorps. The applicant did not detail the high-quality training or connect it back to the original model used to show fidelity to the model and proven success and there is not an indication of specialized training needed to occur as a result of this model. Additionally, the applicant neglected to include any pre and post assessment whether formally or informally and this would be connected back to the model. Assessments were used solely to assess the value of members assisting school staff and not for knowledge transfer or comfort level. The self-reflection component of the training neglected to show outcome and lacks the specificity needed to tie into awareness and understanding of the members.
- AmeriCorps members will be trained in specific AmeriCorps policies and procedures and there are timelines associated with the overall training including opportunities for feedback and mentoring.

Member Supervision

- Good administrative structure. Good description of responsibilities.
- There is a 7:1 member to supervisor ration and the applicant details the responsibilities including evaluation that occur twice a year as well observation visits and school personnel assignments for support providing connectivity, mentoring and further collaboration and supervision. Due to the lack of details are regarding the models training which was identified there is insufficient information to determine if that is being supervised; however, the supervisor is also provided support to help the members with continuous improvements as well as to assist with the regulations set forth as well as priorities and expectations.

Member Experience

- Meets all requirements & incorporates DEI training
- The program did not outline any specific recruiting efforts to recruit AmeriCorps members who reflect the community served and represent a diverse set of backgrounds, talents, and capabilities. There were recruitment efforts with a mutual match; however, this lacked details in regard to demographics, experiences etc. The applicant identifies a community resource: The Office of School and Student Support but only for training and support not in assisting with recruiting efforts or training specific to recruiting efforts which would have increased the likelihood that members would be connected to the community they serve creating a long-term outcome of community sustainability. This office did support the applicant’s diversity, equity and inclusion opportunities.
- It would lend more credibility to the workforce development and teacher shortage goals of the application if the recruitment plan was clearer, especially regarding any plan to recruit from the community. People will stay in the community if they experience success.
- AmeriCorps members had opportunities built into their training to self-reflect on the service experience and learn from the reflection. Additionally, there were opportunities detailed outside the AmeriCorps experience through the resources of Maines DOE as well as opportunities to connect to AmeriCorps as large and the broader network for mentoring opportunities as well as leadership opportunities,

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- Not clear that AC members will be taught how (and encouraged to) promote AC other than wearing T-shirts with AC logo on them.

- The applicant has outlined that through training and appearance are the main ways that a AmeriCorps member will be identified. The applicant lightly touched on the connectivity to the schools that the members work in and this would support this area better if more detailed as connectivity within the community shows identification and support. Signage is also used to support the identification of AmeriCorps members and the applicant has included the name proposed and also AmeriCorps is in the name.

Organizational Capability Overall Rating _____ 25%

Organizational Background and Staffing

- DOE- Lots of experience delivering educational programming.
- Specific positions and teams are identified that provide organizational capacity to the AmeriCorps members as well as AmeriCorps Project Manager that is identified. The teams and positions provide professional development support, expertise and individualized coaching and occur in different intervals throughout. Within the Maine DOE the team does have experience in areas that will support the program as well as overall oversight and management experience. There is an instructional teaching method employed which will allow for data collection, effective communication and collaboration with all members and staff. The applicant had identified an existing internal support team that can help sustain the program, as well as collaboration with the departments in DOE will allow for programs to support participants for employment. The leadership of this program is based on the years of experience in the various areas such as family engagement, diversity, education and collection.
- The applicant also neglected to include any typical components of internal evaluation which could benefit this program’s such as community advisory councils, participant advisory councils, as well as peer reviews, quality control inspections, and customer and participant surveys.

Compliance and Accountability

- DOE- Many systems for accountability already built in
- The applicant neglects to detail how it plans to collect data in a consistent manner and train in the collecting and monitoring of data and confidentiality of data. The applicant also neglects to identify steps to correct data errors.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy _____ 25%

- The applicant is in alignment with AmeriCorps who annually sets a maximum cost per Member Service Year (MSY = 1700 hours) that it will award. The maximum cost per member for this competition is \$28,000. The applicant has $4.90 \text{ MSY} \times \$28,000 = 137,200$ which is their total estimated finding for year 1.
- No non-AmeriCorps resource commitments are identified and it is unsure if there are sufficient funds to support this program in regards to activities needed, program supplies, community engagement, marketing, etc.
- Source of Funds section of budget is blank so it is not possible to determine if there are funds for the rest of the program operation (program director, training, member recruitment, etc.).

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 (1) No (1)

Comments:

- Organizational capacity is strong. Many systems for accountability already exist.
- The applicant has not shown clear evidence that the program or model it is suggesting will make an impact on the population it has identified. Also, there is no clear identification of why this community was chosen over nearby schools. The applicant has also made weak arguments in its logic model and theory of change as it’s lacking connectivity and unsure of how outcomes are to be achieved.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- Outcomes are not quantified.
- The applicant cites a model that is used in urban setting and is replicating this model in an rural setting. The applicant needs cleared details of this model will be adapted as well as components of the model when in pertains to training, sustainability and assessment.
- The applicant has not clearly identified the need of the community by not using data to show academic decline or mental health concerns, except through surveys. Parent participation was not generated which would have led support to the needs. Additionally, as the problem is identified in the logic model the inputs and outcomes are not connected as the mental health gains are intertwined with academic outcomes and should be separated to achieve outcomes related to mental health concerns and those related to academic concerns or decline. The applicant also neglected to show community impact of its program and there is not clear information of how students will attend this program and recruited as no specific data is used or shown.
- There is no clear data on academic or mental health and no pre and post data on members to show perception and awareness.
- Due to the lack of implementing a model with fidelity there is no data on training to the model and ensuring it is implemented correctly as well as what data components needs to be monitored and trained on.
- Additionally the applicant has involved identified budget for the actual AmeriCorps members and no additional resources or funding to starting the program and to ensure it is implemented successfully.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

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

- This Rural application the mental health needs of students and connecting youth to education career paths (workplace development). It will modify an urban mentoring model to rural settings. However, the applicant did not address how it will document the modifications and effectiveness of the model in a rural setting. The program is well-aligned with MDOE's mission and programming. However, there is no evidence that the administration and impacted faculty of the three school districts and high schools were involved in the planning. A condition of the grant might be that the principal of each high school (or the superintendent of the district) provide a letter indicating the school is committing to: a) providing at least 60 minutes weekly of contact time between the Member and assigned students [Note: This time allotment might need to be modified to align with class schedule times.]; b) staffing responsibilities and commitments for supervision and programmatic support; and c) participating in the 2025 and 2027 MIYHS survey and provide MDOE data results to the specific questions related to mental health and community involvement only for the purpose of evaluating results of this project. Those commitments would have resulted in a higher score for this section.
- The program addresses two priorities: public health in regard to student mental health issues and workforce development to address the shortage of individuals entering the teaching profession or other school related occupations.' • No information was presented on whether the targeted communities meet any of the 2522.450(c) criteria other than a comment that they are rural communities even though they are located in a county considered urban.. • While the proposal is similar to other mentorship proposals that have been or are being proposed, it is more directly

placed within the school setting. While located in York County, it is in a rural area of that county. While not ideal, it ranks as adequate on portfolio diversity. • It is clear that the DOE sees this program as a test case for a program that, if successful, it would look to expand and replicate throughout Maine. As such, a subgoal of the effort appears to be replicability. • The program aligns strongly with MDOE's mission and work and builds upon existing relationships with the involved school districts; MDOE is financially stable and has the necessary resources, even if in-kind, to support and potentially continue the effort; it has a large and relatively stable staff and leadership; Note that the source of local funds is not identified and I'm assuming it's in-kind personnel time from the Department and the various school districts. • A community advisory group was developed to assist in designing the program, although not much information is provided about this group and its work; • MDOE itself has very limited experience in working with volunteers and nothing is said in the application about volunteer utilization and capacity and the cooperating school districts who will most likely be responsible for that element of the program. • The exact roles of MDOE and school personnel were not fully explored and explained. In addition, while the application indicates a new position would be added to the Department to manage this program, when interviewed the project team indicated that this has changed. As a result, we should ask them to clarify how the program will be managed and how responsibilities will be allocated both within MDOE and between MDOE and the three participating districts.

- Didn't see there would be supervision or staffing with the adequate credentials related to mental health.

Preferences from RFA Announcement

- York County is not included in the 6, 7, or 8 USDA rural-urban continuum. Also, the proposal lacks evidence that the local communities/schools were involved in the planning for the proposal or that they have committed to the responsibilities outlined for them.
- The proposal is directly from MDOE and not a coalition of the three school departments; however, elements of the proposal indicate that the three districts are working cooperatively in planning and implementing the program. The application is not in a 6, 7, or 8 rural county.

Past Performance

- They mention leveraging \$74,450 in public funds as match, but do not include those funds in the budget. They have experience with 1 AC member and with Margaret Chase Smith summer college interns. While the proposal mentions supervision will occur through the hiring of a staff person, the Director indicated in the interview that they have since decided current staff (the director and specialists) will assume those responsibilities as part of their ongoing support and TA for schools.
- • MDOE has the financial and human resources to support this project; • The performance targets for the grant need to be better defined and clarified. For example, they are projecting serving 105 students with all of them achieving the program goals, which seems unlikely. The workforce development target/goals are not provided as a program output or outcome other than number of students in post-secondary education training. I'm not sure what the six focus areas they mention in end outcome are. Finally, the whole area of capacity building seems incomplete.. • While evaluation is not addressed in detail, the Department does have the internal resources to fully evaluate the program. • At the moment, I don't think we have a report from the federal grant manager who handled the grant reference in the interview. I'll check once the staff report is up. I will note that MDOE generally handles grants as pass

throughs to other school units, not as a direct program they administer. As such, it was difficult for them to identify a comparable grant to AmeriCorps. • MDOE has very limited experience in working with volunteers other than summer interns through the Margaret Chase Smith Center. No information is available on the experience of the three cooperating school departments, which is most likely where any volunteers will be located/managed. • Area is rated adequate more on the basis or capacity than documented past performance on a similar grant.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- The budget does not reflect the \$74,450 public funds they say will be leveraged. I assume these funds are for time of MDOE staff supervision of the members and grant support.
- MDOE has the financial and human resources to support this project;
- • The performance targets for the grant need to be better defined and clarified. For example, they are projecting serving 105 students with all of them achieving the program goals. The workforce development target/goals are not provided as a program output or outcome other than number of students in post-secondary education training. I'm not sure what the six focus areas they mention in end outcome are.
- • While evaluation is not addressed in detail, the Department does have the internal resources to fully evaluate the program.
- MDOE generally handles grants as pass throughs to other school units, not as a direct program they administer. As such, it was difficult for them to identify a comparable grant to AmeriCorps. • MDOE has very limited experience in working with volunteers other than summer interns through the Margaret Chase Smith Center. No information is available on the experience of the three cooperating school departments, which is most likely where any volunteers will be located/managed. • Area is rated adequate more on the basis or capacity than documented past performance on a similar grant.

Fiscal Systems

- There are audit findings of 16 significant deficiencies primarily related to COVID relief funds. Therefore, those findings are not of much concern for administering this grant. This State department has robust financial management systems and financial strength, as reflected in the audit and State budget.
- MDOE clearly has considerable experience in administering grant programs and the requirements that go along with them. At this same time, most of these are pass through to sub-grantees where MDOE then plays the role of providing overall compliance monitoring. This is a different role than serving as the actual grantee where additional reporting and monitoring might be required. In reviewing the provided audit, it is clear that there were numerous compliance findings, many of which were related to emergency pandemic funding and the large influx of feral aid associated with it. While I didn't review all of the findings in detail, it appears that many, if not most, were related to reporting and documentation issues. It's also worth noting that during the interview, it became clear that the Department's finance person on the call had not been involved in preparing or reviewing the budget. Per the staff report, however, MDOE has apparently been compliant with requirements for the Planning Grant, which adds to my comfort.

Grant Readiness

- Leadership support for this project is strong at MDOE. (Even the Associate Commissioner joined the interview call.) Local district support needs to be determined. In the Need section, the proposal used MIYHS data, which is a gold standard since it adheres to US CDC surveying criteria. However, statewide data were shared instead of County or District data, which should be available. To ascertain progress in student mental health and sense of connection to the community, district-level 2025 and 2027 MIYHS data should be used with 2023 MIYHS data as baseline. (2023 data were collected in February.) Only school districts can provide their own data, but the County data is available at: www.maine.gov/miyhs/2021-results. Results for 2023 will be available in Fall 2023. For more information, contact: korey.pow@maine.gov
- The Department has the systems, policy, experience, and human resources to implement this grant. It is, however, different in character from the grants the department normally handles. I would suggest that the VM grant manager meet with the program manager and the department's financial person as early as possible to ensure that all parties understand and can comply with the AC grant regulations and reporting requirements. I'm also a bit concerned that the program manager mentioned as a new position in the grant application has apparently changed and will not be brought on board requiring a clarification of who will be responsible for what. I'm not sure if I fully understood the reasons for this change and how the program will now be supervised. Clarity of roles and responsibilities may be an issue.
- Disappointed in the quality of the application given they had a planning grant.



Volunteer Maine

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APPENDIX C: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Before you begin to review applications:

1. Check each statement to indicate you agree.
2. Sign the form and send to Commission staff. Digital signatures are accepted. Scans may be emailed to the address above. Hard copies should be sent to 105 SHS.

- I have read the Commission policy on Conflict of Interest as outlined in the Reviewer Handbook and understand that I must contact the appropriate Commission staff if a conflict arises during my service as a reviewer.
- I also will not divulge any confidential information I may become aware of during the grant review process.
- Upon completion of this work, I will return to the Commission or destroy any application hard copies or digital files and not share them with anyone or hold them.
- I fully understand that I must sign and return this Conflict of Interest Acknowledgement to the Commission Office before I begin review of grant applications.

Name (please print): Tiffany North

Signature: Tiffany North

Date: 4-8-23

[For Commission use only -- Date received: _____]



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Name (please print):

Pamela M Proulx-Curry

Signature:

Pamela M Proulx-Curry

Date:

4/18/2023

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Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service
A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism



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I fully understand that I must sign and return this Conflict of Interest Acknowledgement to the Commission Office before I begin review of grant applications.

Name (please print): Edward Barrett

Signature: Edward A. Barrett

Date: 4-19-23

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Name (please print): Becky Hayes Boober

Signature: Becky Hayes Boober

Date: 4/18/2023

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