

**Award Justification Statement**  
**RFA 202407141 - Maine Rural State AmeriCorps Grant**

**I. Summary**

Volunteer Maine, the state service commission, awards *grants* of federal AmeriCorps program resources to community-based agencies (public and nonprofit). This RFA 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 Rural State 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 36 and 37 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)

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. External peer reviewers: Madelyn Hennessey, Anne Louise Rice and Alsina Brenenstuhl. Grants Task Force peer reviewers: Ed Barrett and Kelly Day.

### **III. Qualifications & Experience.**

(excerpt pg 25 of RFA) 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 were not fiscally responsible for the program are eligible. Eligible organizations that are primarily female or minority managed or led, and agencies within or primarily recruiting from designated labor surplus areas are encouraged to apply.

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.** This grant program awards a flat amount per 1700 hours of service by AmeriCorps members. The amount for this competition was \$27,000 per 1700 hours.
- VI. Conclusion.** The sole proposal submitted addressed the RFA priority for capacity building and was deemed to have met the criteria for funding eligibility.





## Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service  
*A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism*



October 1, 2024

Krystal Williams  
Alpha Legal Foundation  
110 Marginal Way, Ste. 195  
Portland, ME 04101

SUBJECT: Notice of Conditional Contract Award under RFA # 202407141  
MAINE RURAL STATE AMERICORPS GRANTS

Dear Krystal,

This letter is in regard to the subject Request for Applications (RFA), issued by the Maine Commission for Community Service for MAINE RURAL STATE AMERICORPS GRANTS. The Commission has evaluated the proposals received using the evaluation criteria identified in the RFA, and the Commission is hereby announcing its conditional contract award to the following bidder:

•Alpha Legal Foundation

The bidder listed above received the evaluation team's highest ranking. The Commission will be contacting the aforementioned bidder soon to negotiate a contract. 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 contract services until a contract 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).



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

Thank you for your interest in doing business with the State of Maine.

Sincerely,

Jamie McFaul  
Grants Officer  
207-624-7790

### **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).

## Peer Reviewers -- Consensus Process Worksheet

<b>Strong</b>	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.
<b>Adequate</b>	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.
<b>Weak</b>	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
<b>Substandard</b>	This section barely responds to the criteria, has a significant flaw, or lacks any indication this element could succeed as described.
<b>Incomplete/Nonresponsive</b>	This section of the application does not respond to the criteria.

APP ID: 24ES268326

PROGRAM NAME: Maine JusticeCorps an AmeriCorps Program

INITIAL COMMENTS: LINK TO DOC

FUNDS REQUESTED: \$ 81,000.00

APPLICANT NAME: Alpha Legal Foundation

Exec Summary Conforms?

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						
Program Design (50 total possible)	Tiffany North	Anne Louise	Tade Sullivan	Rosalani Moore	Consensus Rating	Point Value
The Community and Need	Adequate	Strong	Weak	Strong	Adequate	6
Logic Model	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Adequate	6
Evidence of Effectiveness	Adequate	Strong	Weak	Strong	Adequate	6
Funding Priority and Preferences	Strong	Adequate	Adequate	Strong	Adequate	2.25
Member Training	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Adequate	4.5
Member Supervision	Strong	Adequate	Adequate	Strong	Adequate	4.5
Member Experience	Adequate	Strong	Adequate	Strong	Adequate	4.5
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification	Substandard	Adequate	Adequate	Strong	Adequate	3.75
Program Design Score						37.5

RATER -- Initial Ratings				
Organizational Capability (25 total possible)	Tiffany North	Anne Louise	Tade Sullivan	Rosalani Moore
Organizational Background & Staffing	Adequate	Strong	Adequate	Strong
Commitment to DEIA	Weak	Strong	Strong	Strong
Org. Capability Score				27

RATER -- Initial ratings				
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25 total possible)	Tiffany North	Anne Louise	Tade Sullivan	Rosalani Moore
Member Recruitment	Substandard	Adequate	Weak	Adequate
Member Retention	Weak	Strong	Weak	Adequate
Data Collection	Incomplete/Nonresponsive	Adequate	Weak	Adequate
Budget Alignment to Program Design	Substandard	Adequate	Weak	Adequate
Cost and Budget Score				17.00

### FINAL SECTION TOTALS and RECOMMENDATION

Program Design	Organizational Capability	Cost Effectiveness/ Budget Adequacy	Total Score
37.5	27	17	81.5

Final Consensus Score

Recommendation: 80-89, Recommend for Further Review

## 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					
Proposal Alignment (25%)		Ed Barrett	Kelly Day			Consensus rating	Point Value
Alignment with Funding Priorities		Adequate	Adequate			Adequate	18.75
						Section Score	18.75
		Rater -- initial ratings					
Program Model (10%)						Consensus rating	Point Value
Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)		Incomplete/ Nonresponsive	Adequate			Incomplete/Nonresponsive	0
Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse		Adequate	Weak			Adequate	1.875
Potential for innovation and/or replication		Adequate	Adequate			Adequate	1.875
Strength of evidence planning process will succeed		Weak	Weak			Weak	1.25
						Section Score	5
		Rater -- initial ratings					
Preferences from RFP Announcement (15%)						Consensus rating	Point Value
submitted by an organization led by or primarily supporting or recruiting participants from historically marginalized communities and/or people		Strong	0			Strong	7.5
serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum		Incomplete/ Nonresponsive	Weak			Incomplete/Nonresponsive	0
						Section Score	7.5
		Rater -- initial ratings					
Past Performance (10%)						Consensus rating	Point Value
Prior Grant management experience		Adequate	Adequate			Adequate	7.5
						Section Score	7.5
		Rater -- initial ratings					
Financial Plan (15%)						Consensus rating	Point Value
		Incomplete/Nonresponsive	Weak			Weak	5
						Section Score	5
		Rater -- initial ratings					
Fiscal Systems (15%)						Consensus rating	Point Value
capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements		Adequate	Incomplete/Nonresponsive			Weak	2.5
strength of the sponsoring organization's financial		Incomplete/Nonresponsive	Incomplete/Nonresponsive			Incomplete/Nonresponsive	0
strength of the sponsoring organization's financial status/stability		Incomplete/Nonresponsive	Adequate			Weak	2.5
						Section Score	5
		Rater -- initial ratings					
Grant Readiness (15%)						Consensus rating	Point Value
The applicant's start up plan is detailed, complete, and demonstrates ability to stand up the program on time with resources in place (including staff leadership).		0	Weak			Weak	3.75

The applicant's systems, policies, experience, partnerships, leadership support, financial and personnel resources, etc. are fully prepared to implement the program as of the start date.

Weak	Weak		
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Weak	3.75
Section Score	7.5
GTF Total Score:	56.25
Peer Reviewer Score	81.5
Combined Score	137.75
	of possible 200

\*hlookup pre-programmed

Fix budget and performance measures (esp individuals served)

Recommendation: Fund only if corrections can be negotiated



Legal Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Program/Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Grant Assessment New Applicant**

<b>Date applicant was organized/incorporated:</b>	November 11, 2020
<b>DBAs, other names used:</b>	
<b>Corporate type:</b>	501(c)(3) Nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation

Grant Application Period (from/to dates)	01/01/25	12/31/25
Past Performance period under review (from/to dates):		
First Year of AmeriCorps Funding: [year] Grant cycle:		
First AmeriCorps funds were [X] planning grant [ ] operating grant		
This application is [ ] cost reimbursement [X] fixed amount		

**➤ Program Alignment and Model**

Yes	No	N/A	
X	X		Application addresses one or more state funding priorities: 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

- Elements to review in assessment:
  - Strength of alignment of need with funding priorities
  - applicant proposes to serve communities described in 2522.450(c).
  - Performance measures relate to need and funding priorities
  - Evaluation plan for proposed program
- Proposed program clearly fits one of the AmeriCorps program models (pg 7 of RFP, **delete** models not relevant and retain the one that fits this proposal)
  - ✓ *Specialized skills programs.* A service program that is targeted to address specific educational, public safety, human, or environmental needs and recruits individuals with special skills or provides specialized pre-service training to enable participants to be placed individually or in teams in positions in which the participants can meet such needs.
  - ✓ *Specialized service programs.* A community service program designed to meet the needs of rural communities, using teams or individual placements to address the development needs of rural communities and to combat rural poverty, including health care, education, and job training.
  - ✓ *Programs that expand service program capacity.* (1) A program that provides specialized training to individuals in service-learning and places the individuals after such training in positions, including positions as service-learning coordinators, to facilitate service-learning in programs. (2) An AmeriCorps entrepreneur program that identifies, recruits, and trains gifted young adults of all backgrounds and assists them in designing solutions to community problems.

**COMMENTS AFTER REVIEW OF INFO**

Alpha Legal Foundation (ALF) is organized to improve upon structural deficiencies within the judicial system, as especially related to underserved communities. ALF has highlighted Southern Maine (York, Cumberland, Androscoggin), people of color, and rural Mainers as viable market segments for this work. These groups are somewhat contradictory with limited overlap; and ALF may operate best through a more defined niche. For

Legal Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Program/Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

example, rural Maine is very much homogenous, while the more diverse cities and suburbs of Southern Maine are obviously not rural. As a smaller organization, ALF will lack the resources to accommodate such disparate market segments and should consider specializing or addressing the needs of one particular demographic.

➤ Preferences from RFA Announcement			
Yes	No	N/A	
X			[ANY GRANT TYPE] The proposal is from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together to implement a common approach to a community problem.
X			Submitted by an organization led by or primarily supporting or recruiting participants from historically marginalized communities and/or people.
	X		[RURAL] 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

#### COMMENTS AFTER REVIEW OF INFO

ALF executive summary and narrative highlights the structural deficiencies permeating the judicial system for addressing the needs of rural communities. ALF, however, also indicates that it will target York, Cumberland, and Androscoggin counties, which cover the largest cities in Maine, in Portland and its suburbs and Lewiston. York County is a noted resort area, with Kennebunkport, Old Orchard Beach, and Ogunquit along the Sea Coast. Grant proposal may have been written to “check the boxes” for Rural Maine.

#### ➤ Past Performance (All applicants)

- Grant management experience from interview

#### COMMENTS AFTER REVIEW OF INFO

No comments. Tech reviewers make own determination.

➤ Financial Plan			
Yes	No	Element	
	X	Budget complete; few or no errors	
	X	Required info entered	
Yes	No	N/A	
X			If Cost Reimbursement or Fixed Amount: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Share sources identified/specified, allowable</li> </ul>
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Match rate meets or exceeds requirements for age of applicant</li> </ul>
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indirect or administrative costs calculated accurately; include Commission share</li> </ul>

#### COMMENTS AFTER REVIEW OF INFO

Budget 1 and Budget 2 show \$81,000 in top-line projected revenue only – from this very same grant. All other budget entries are filled in with zeros. Income and expense

Legal Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Program/Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

projections and estimates would be helpful, as it is now impossible to calculate financial ratios to assess the strength of this organization and make relevant comparisons.

### ➤ Fiscal Systems

- Strength of fiscal systems as reflected in survey and audit
- Financial strength and position as reflected in 990 and audit

Yes	No	
X		Applicant registered in SAM
X		Applicant <b>not</b> listed on Excluded Parties registry
	X	Is applicant required to file a 990 with the IRS? If no, explain below.
	X	Does applicant have an audit performed? Note frequency below along with date of last audit.
	X	Is there evidence the applicant has managed other federal funds. If yes, note awarding agency below.

### COMMENTS AFTER REVIEW OF INFO

ALF describes itself as a micro non-profit organization with annual receipts of less than \$50,000. Full independent audits may be too costly and time consuming at this level. ALF files Form 990-N, or the e-Postcard, with the Internal Revenue Service. Alpha Legal Foundation is actively viable up to and possibly through March 18, 2025.

### ➤ Grant Readiness

- Organizational readiness from survey and interview
- Volunteer management practices from readiness survey

### COMMENTS AFTER REVIEW OF INFO

- ALF, although a small organization, is continuously improving its financial controls. Still, I find limited information, in terms of assets, liabilities, revenue, and expenses.



## Volunteer Maine

19 Elkins Lane, 105 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333

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[www.MaineServiceCommission.gov](http://www.MaineServiceCommission.gov)



### 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: 9.6.24

[For Commission use only - - Date received: \_\_\_\_\_]



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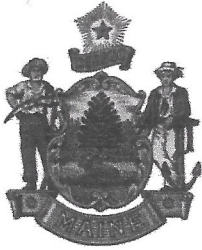
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Name (please print): Tade Sullivan

Signature: Tade Sullivan

Date: 9/7/24

[For Commission use only - - Date received: \_\_\_\_\_]



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Name (please print): Anne Louise Rice

Signature: Anne Louise Rice

Date: 9.3.24

[For Commission use only -- Date received: \_\_\_\_\_]





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Name (please print): Rosalani Moore

Signature: Rosalani Moore

Date: 9/9/2024

[For Commission use only - - Date received: \_\_\_\_\_]