

**2013 NEW YORK STATE AMERICORPS PROGRAM
CONSOLIDATED FUNDING APPLICATION**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is AmeriCorps?

A. AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), an independent federal agency whose mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. AmeriCorps is made up of three main programs: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps). Visit www.americorps.gov/about/programs/index.asp to find out more about the differences between these three programs.

Q. What is an AmeriCorps member?

A. An AmeriCorps member is an individual who is enrolled in an approved national service position and engages in intensive service to address pressing community problems. AmeriCorps members serve through nonprofits, public agencies, institutions of higher education, Indian Tribes, and faith-based organizations to tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, teach computer skills, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, and help communities respond to disasters, among other activities. AmeriCorps members are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award upon successful completion of their term of service. Some AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance to support them during their term of service.

Q. Is an AmeriCorps member the same as a volunteer?

A. No. An AmeriCorps member is an individual serving in an approved national service position for a pre-determined term of service. AmeriCorps members are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award and might receive a living allowance and other benefits such as health insurance and childcare. Additionally, there are limitations on the types of activities in which an AmeriCorps member can engage. Volunteers are not eligible for a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, and typically do not receive compensation or have a pre-defined term of service. Volunteers and AmeriCorps members might serve side-by-side and AmeriCorps members often recruit and manage volunteers.

Q. What are the living allowance (stipend) requirements for AmeriCorps members?

A. An approved AmeriCorps budget must include a living allowance for full-time members between \$12,100 (minimum) and \$24,200 (maximum) per member except as noted below. For Operating (i.e.: Cost-Reimbursement grants, this amount must be included in the proposed budget. The living allowance is not required for members serving in less than full-time terms of service. If a program chooses to provide a living allowance to a less than full-time member, it must comply with the maximum limits in the chart below.

Members serving in a full-time capacity may be eligible for health care coverage and child care reimbursements. After members successfully complete their term of service, full-time members receive an education award of \$5,550. This rate of an AmeriCorps Education Award remains equal to a Federal Pell Grant. Other members receive a prorated award. The award can be used

to pay for the costs of attending an institution of high education or to pay back qualified student loans.

Members who already have student loans may qualify for postponement, or forbearance, of the repayment of your loans during their service, and the education award will help them pay off qualified student loans when they are finished.

Member Service Term	Minimum # of Hours	Minimum Living Allowance	Maximum Total Living Allowance
Full-time	1700	\$12,100	\$24,200
One-year Half-time	900	n/a	\$12,800
Two-year Half-time	900	n/a	\$12,800
Reduced Half-time	675	n/a	\$9,600
Quarter-time	450	n/a	\$6,400
Minimum-time	300	n/a	\$4,300

Q. Does CNCS recruit and train the AmeriCorps members?

A. No. While CNCS has an online recruitment system that AmeriCorps programs can utilize, each program is responsible for recruiting its own AmeriCorps members. Additionally, AmeriCorps programs are entirely responsible for training their AmeriCorps members. In your application you must describe how you will recruit, orient and train the AmeriCorps members you are requesting.

Q. Must an AmeriCorps member serve for a certain amount of time?

A. Yes. An AmeriCorps member may serve either a full-time term of service, which requires a minimum of 1700 hours of service within a one-year period of time; or a part-time term, which can range from 300 hours to 900 hours.

Q. Can AmeriCorps members take the place of current staff or volunteers at my organization?

A. No. AmeriCorps members may not displace staff or volunteers at your organization, nor may they perform any services or duties that would supplant the hiring of employed workers.

Q. Are there certain activities in which AmeriCorps members and staff cannot engage?

A. Yes. While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or CNCS, staff and members may not engage in the following activities (see 45 CFR § 2520.65):

- Attempting to influence legislation;
- Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;

- Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- Providing a direct benefit to: (1) a business organized for profit; (2) a labor union; (3) a partisan political organization; (4) a nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (participating in partisan political activities or spending funds on lobbying and grassroots efforts in excess of allowable limits); and (5) an organization engaged in the religious activities described above, (unless CNCS assistance is not used to support those religious activities);
- Conducting a voter registration drive or using CNCS funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services.

AmeriCorps members may not engage in the above activities directly or indirectly by recruiting, training, or managing others for the primary purpose of engaging in one of the activities listed above. Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the activities listed above on their own initiative, on non-AmeriCorps time, and using non-CNCS funds. Individuals should not wear the AmeriCorps logo while doing so.

Q. What are the eligibility requirements?

A. AmeriCorps State grants are awarded to public or private nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and other community organizations; institutions of higher education; government entities within states or territories (e.g., cities, counties); Indian Tribes; labor organizations; partnerships and consortia; and intermediaries that will operate solely in New York State.

Organizations that have been convicted of a Federal crime are disqualified from receiving the assistance described in this *Notice*. Pursuant to the Lobbying Disclosure Action of 1995, an organization described in Section 501 (c)(4) of the Internal Revenue code of 1986, 26 U.S.C. 501 (c)(4) that engages in lobbying activities is not eligible to apply.

Current AmeriCorps grantees may apply for assistance. Receiving funding previously from the Commission, CNCS, or another Federal agency is not a prerequisite to applying under this RFP.

Q. Is there additional information or Training/Technical Assistance available to applicants?

A. The 2013 State AmeriCorps Technical Assistance Slide Presentation can be accessed on the *New Yorkers Volunteer* website at www.NewYorkersVolunteer.ny.gov by clicking on the promo to the right of the page titled 'New York State Consolidated Funding Application – AmeriCorps Program Technical Assistance Slide Presentation'

Q. What is the application review process for CFA AmeriCorps proposals?

A. Proposals submitted through the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) for AmeriCorps funding which meet the application deadline will be included in the State AmeriCorps Application Review Process. Following the application due date, all proposals will be reviewed to confirm the following components are included: (1) Application Narrative; (2) Budget; (3) Performance Measures; and (4) any additional forms as outlined in the CFA. Applications that do

not contain the aforementioned components or fail to adhere to the application or budget guidance documents may be considered ineligible and not receive further evaluation.

The State also seeks to fund quality proposals that are geographically diverse. The following process will be implemented in an attempt to have at least one AmeriCorps program operating in up to six of ten regions of the State as defined by the Regional Economic Development Council structure.

Regional Council Review

Regional Councils will review and rank applications based on a set of standards, referred to as "endorsement standards." An application will be scored by the Regional Council in which the proposed project will take place. Regional Councils will assign each project a single score of 20, 15, 10, 5 or 0 (no fractions) based on merit. The Regional Council endorsement will account for 20% of the total review. In cases where an applicant is proposing a project with multiple locations in multiple regions, the Councils from each region will provide scores.

The State Review

Following the Regional Council Review, each application will be reviewed by two independent reviewers. Points awarded by each reviewer will be recorded and averaged. If there is a disparity of more than 15 points between the two reviewers, one additional review will be conducted and the three total points awarded will be averaged. The average points, and any additional Performance Measure Bonus awarded during this phase will account for 80% of the total application score. The final application score will be determined by adding the points awarded during the Regional Council Review (20%) with the points awarded during The State Review (80%).

Once all proposals have been assigned a final application score, the highest scoring application in each of the ten regions, that score an 80% or higher through the Application Review Process, will be moved to the top of the scoring chart in rank order of their score from highest to lowest. The State will fund the top application on the list, and fund each application that follows in rank order until all funding has been awarded.

In the event that an application is not submitted by at least six of the ten regions, or at least one application from six different regions does not receive a score of 80% or higher through the Application Review Process, The State may award a second AmeriCorps grant to an applicant within a region that already has one proposal funded. In this scenario, the application with the highest final score above 80% in any region would be funded, followed by the next highest scoring application regardless of region until all funding has been awarded.

Applicants may be funded at an amount less than their requested amount in order to maximize funding, and meet the geographic diversity priority.

Q. What will be considered when my proposal is being reviewed and scored?

A. Through the CFA, The State will give priority funding consideration to applicants that focus solely or in-part on the Economic Opportunity Focus Area as defined in the Serve America Act. Program activity in the Economic Activity Focus Area will provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people. Grant activities will help economically disadvantaged people to: (1) have improved access to

services and benefits aimed at contributing to their enhanced financial literacy; (2) transition into or remain in safe, healthy, affordable housing; (3) have improved employability leading to increased success in becoming employed; or (4) implement other initiatives that engage and provide resources through AmeriCorps member service to individuals who struggle to find or hold a job because of child-care responsibilities, a prior criminal record, a lack of training, or an unstable housing situation.

The quality of each AmeriCorps application will be assessed using the following scoring matrix:

Application Assessment Criteria		
Category	%	Sub-Categories
Rationale & Approach/ Program Design	50%	Need (7 pts)
		Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems (10 pts)
		Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed & Measurable Community Impact (10 pts)
		Member Recruitment (5 pts)
		Member Training (5 pts)
		Member Supervision (5 pts)
		Member Experience (3 pts)
		Volunteer Generation (3 pts)
		Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification (2 pts)
Organizational Capability	25%	Organizational Background and Staffing (8 pts)
		Sustainability (6 pts)
		Compliance and Accountability (11 pts)
Cost-Effectiveness & Budget Adequacy	25%	Cost-Effectiveness (13 pts)
		Budget Adequacy (12 pts)

Q. What is a State Service Commission?

A. A State Service Commission is a governor-appointment entity responsible for administering national and community service programs in its State (or Territory). Funding for AmeriCorps programs operating within one state or territory is administered through the State Service Commission.

Q. What are the funding priorities for AmeriCorps?

A. CNCS seeks to target CFA AmeriCorps funding in the Economic Opportunity focus area. To maximize the impact of the investment in national service, CNCS is seeking to fund programs at no more than \$250,000 that can demonstrate community impact and solve community problems through an evidence-based approach (e.g. performance data, research, theory of change). The Economic Opportunity focus area can be found in the CFA Resources Guide: http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2013/resources_available_2013.pdf.

Q. What does evidence-basis/evidence-informed mean and what documentation is required?

A. Evidence-basis/evidence-informed refers to a program's demonstration of why it is proposing a particular intervention to address an identified community problem. Evidence for the intervention could include results from research, performance data, or results from a similar, successful program and would provide the basis for decisions about the design, frequency and intensity of the proposed intervention.

For example: An applicant proposes to engage AmeriCorps members to recruit and manage volunteers. The volunteers will tutor third-grade students in a low-performing school for an hour a day, three days per week. The proposal indicates that as a result, the students' academic performance will improve. The applicant must describe in its proposal the evidence that the design of the intervention (a certain set of tutoring activities delivered for one hour three times per week) will result in improved academic performance.

Q. What other type of evidence is required in a proposal?

A. An application must provide evidence of the need, which refers to data that demonstrates the extent or severity of the need in the target community.

Q. What is a theory of change?

A. A theory of change is a theory (or hypothesis) for how an intervention can address or solve a stated problem. A theory of change articulates a problem, a proposed intervention, and the change (outcomes) that is expected to result from delivering the intervention. Underlying the theory is a set of assumptions, supported by evidence, about why the intervention is likely to lead to the outcomes.

Q. Is there a limit on the amount of grant funds I may request?

A. Applicants may only request up to \$250,000 in Federal funding for a CFA AmeriCorps Program.

Q. What does Cost per MSY mean?

A. Cost per MSY stands for Cost per Member Service Year and represents the cost to CNCS of your AmeriCorps program. One MSY is the equivalent of one full-time term of service (1700 member service hours). The cost per MSY is calculated by dividing the total amount of CNCS funds requested by the total number of MSYs requested. For example, if the application requests \$10,000 in CNCS funds and 10 MSYs, then the cost per MSY is \$1,000. The cost per MSY does not include child care or the cost of the Segal Education Award a member may earn.

Q. Can we use this grant to pay for general organizational expenses?

A. No. AmeriCorps grants are only for costs directly related to the proposed project, rather than general organizational expenses. Fundraising costs, including raising funds to meet your AmeriCorps grant matching costs, are considered general organizational expenses and cannot be paid with grant funds. However, to a limited degree, you may capture indirect administrative costs related to your AmeriCorps program. The application instructions provide guidance on charging administrative costs to the grant.

Q. Will I have to contribute matching funds?

A. Yes. The money awarded as part of an AmeriCorps grant does not cover the full cost of running an AmeriCorps program. Successful applicants must contribute a minimum of 24% match to support their program. Match can be in the form of cash, in-kind, or other as defined in the AmeriCorps Budget Instructions. Match documentation must be maintained by the grantee and presented up on request.

Q. *Can the grant funds be used for any programming or must the program designed include the use of AmeriCorps members?*

A. As an applicant, you would propose a program that addresses a local community need. You would document that need, propose the intervention (service activities) that AmeriCorps members would engage in to address that need and describe the outcomes you expect the program to make that would demonstrate a measurable impact on the need.

Q. *How many AmeriCorps members will my program receive?*

A. In your application you must indicate the number and type of AmeriCorps member positions you are requesting based on your program design and desired outcomes. If your proposal is approved for funding, CNCS will determine how many AmeriCorps members will be included in your award.

Q. *In New York State do AmeriCorps programs have to provide workman's compensation coverage for AmeriCorps members and if so how much does it cost?*

A. In New York State, AmeriCorps members are covered under Workers Compensation Insurance. In order to contract the State, the employer/vendor must have coverage through a current policy in order to be determined responsible. New York State Workers' Compensation Law requires that employers operating in New York State have workers' compensation coverage for their employees, with limited exceptions. Employers are required to obtain and keep in effect workers' compensation coverage for all employees, even part-time employees and family members that are employed by the company. Employers must obtain workers' compensation insurance with an insurance carrier authorized by the New York State Workers' Compensation Board.

Q. *In New York State do AmeriCorps programs pay FICA on member stipends?*

A. Unless exempted by the IRS, all AmeriCorps programs must pay FICA for any member receiving a living allowance, even when CNCS does not supply the living allowance. If exempted, please note in the narrative. In the first column next to FICA, indicate the number of members who will receive FICA. Calculate the FICA at 7.65% of the total amount of the living allowance.

Q. *Does New York State have minimum requirements or required health insurance providers for AmeriCorps members/staff?*

A. New York State does not mandate or recommend a specific health insurance provider to AmeriCorps grantees. When required to provide healthcare insurance coverage (*due to member term*), the grantee may obtain healthcare from any provider. Coverage provided by the grantee must be provided for a period of no more than 364 days, and cannot be renewed or extended beyond that period. Coverage must include the following minimum benefits:

- a. Physician services for illness or injury
- b. Hospital room and board
- c. Emergency room
- d. X-ray and laboratory
- e. Prescription drugs
- f. Limited mental/nervous disorders
- g. Limited substance abuse coverage
- h. An annual deductible of no more than \$250 charges per member
- i. No more than \$1,000 total annual out-of-pocket per member

- j. A 20% co-pay or a comparable fixed fee with the exception of a 50% co-pay for mental and substance abuse care
- k. A maximum benefit of at least \$50,000 per occurrence or cause

Q. How long is the grant period?

A. AmeriCorps program implementation grants typically have a three-year period, but funds are provided one year at a time. Continued funding during the course of the three years is contingent upon satisfactory performance, compliance, the availability of funds, and other criteria established in the award agreement. The budget submitted in the application is for a one-year period.

Q. What is an operating site?

A. An operating site is the organization that manages the AmeriCorps program on behalf of the multi-state recipient of the grant from CNCS. A multi-state grantee must have an operating site in each state in which it has AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps members may be placed at the operating site, or an operating site may place AmeriCorps members at multiple member service locations.

Q. What is a member service site?

A. A member service location is the site at which an AmeriCorps member is placed to provide his/her service to the community.

Q. Is it acceptable to have AmeriCorps members whose primary responsibilities are office-based computer work?

A. Allowable member service activities can be direct service or capacity building. Direct service activities must be designed to impact a documented compelling community need, should be evidence-based and lead to measurable impact. Capacity building activities must also be designed to impact a documented compelling community need and cannot be solely intended to support the administration or operations of the organization. Capacity Building activities include:

- Recruiting and/or managing community volunteers;
- Implementing effective volunteer management practices;
- Completing community assessments that identify goals and recommendations;
- Developing new systems and business processes or enhancing existing systems/processes.

Q. The CFA Resources Guide indicates that applicants who opt into Standardized National Performance Measures will receive Bonus Points. Will I receive Bonus Points if I opt into both Standardized National Performance Measures and Applicant Determined Performance Measures?

A. Applicants that propose to address only Standardized Economic Opportunity Performance Measures may be awarded up to an additional 10 points. Applicants that propose to track Standardized Economic Opportunity Performance Measures and Applicant-Determined Economic Opportunity Performance Measures, of which 50% or more are Standardized Economic Opportunity Performance Measures, may receive up to an additional 5 points.

Q: *Where can I learn more about an AmeriCorps Grant?*

A: Applicants to the CFA State AmeriCorps Program should carefully review each of the following resources to more fully understand how the AmeriCorps program operates, and to prepare a quality proposal that complies with all requirements:

2013 CFA Available Resources Manual (pp. 168-184)

http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2013/new-available_resources_2013.pdf

2013 CFA AmeriCorps Program Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

<http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/faq#cfa>

2013 CFA AmeriCorps Program Budget Instructions

http://www.newyorkersvolunteer.ny.gov/docfiles/CFA_AmeriCorps_Program_-_Budget_Instructions_fin.pdf

2013 CFA AmeriCorps Program Technical Assistance Presentation

http://www.newyorkersvolunteer.ny.gov/docfiles/CFA_AmeriCorps_TA_Resource.pdf

New York State Commission on National & Community Service website

www.NewYorkersVolunteer.ny.gov

Q: *The AmeriCorps grant funds volunteers. Will it also provide money for supervision?*

A: An AmeriCorps grant awards funding eligible organizations that will operate an AmeriCorps program, which includes placing AmeriCorps members in structured service positions. AmeriCorps members are not volunteers, but are national service participants. An AmeriCorps member is an individual serving in an approved national service position for a pre-determined term of service. AmeriCorps members are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award and might receive a living allowance and other benefits such as health insurance and childcare. Additionally, there are limitations on the types of activities in which an AmeriCorps member can engage. Community Volunteers are not eligible for a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, and typically do not receive compensation or have a pre-defined term of service. Community Volunteers and AmeriCorps members may serve side-by-side and AmeriCorps members often recruit and manage Community Volunteers.

A CFA AmeriCorps grantee agency may budget for a professional staff position that will implement its AmeriCorps program. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the 2013 CFA AmeriCorps Program Budget Instructions to determine allowable and unallowable expenses, as well as full understand how to prepare their budget in the CFA Portal. The 2013 CFA AmeriCorps Program Budget Instructions can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

http://www.newyorkersvolunteer.ny.gov/docfiles/CFA_AmeriCorps_Program_-_Budget_Instructions_fin.pdf