Planning Grant Resources
AmeriCorps State and National
April 2023

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Overview

Congratulations on being awarded an AmeriCorps State and National planning grant. Planning grant award recipients spend one year developing components for an AmeriCorps program that would be described in an application to be submitted in a subsequent grant competition. This document is intended to highlight grant requirements, where to find them, and provide you with helpful hints as a supplement to the Statutes and Regulations, Notice of Grant Award, and Program Specific and General Terms and Conditions. This resource document includes information specific to direct planning grantees.

Acronyms

- ASN: AmeriCorps State and National
- CNCS: Corporation for National and Community Service
- FFR: Federal Financial Report
- GARP: Grant Applications Review Process
- MSY: Member Service Year
- NGA: Notice of Grant Award
- NOFO: Notice of Funding Opportunity
- NSCHC: National Service Criminal History Check
- NST: National Service Trust
- OIG: Office of Inspector General
- OGA: Office of Grant Administration
- ORE: Office of Research and Evaluation
- ORO: Office of Regional Operations
- PD: Position Description
- PII: Personal Identifying Information
- PM: Portfolio Manager
- PPR: Project Performance Report
- SAM: System for Award Management
- SPM: Senior Portfolio Manager
- T&Cs: Terms and Conditions
- TTA: Training and Technical Assistance

Key Contacts

Office of Regional Operations (ORO)

Office Purpose: Responsible for providing support, technical assistance, and oversight to AmeriCorps State and National grantees; including: Planning grants, State Commission grants, National Direct grants, and Native Nations grants.

Grantee Interaction: Primary point of contact, frequent direct communications and calls with assigned Portfolio Manager.

AmeriCorps State and National (ASN)

Office Purpose: Responsible for assessing, creating, and implementing governance policies and procedures, managing grant competitions, and providing AmeriCorps State and National specific training and support to the Office of Regional Operations staff and grantees.

Grantee Interaction:
Directly interacts by distributing policy and procedural email communications via ASNInformation@cns.gov, providing training sessions, distributing resources, and hosting monthly grantee and State Commission calls. Indirectly interacts by supporting Office of Regional Operations with planning grantee portfolio management.

Office of Grant Administration (OGA)

Office Purpose: Responsible for facilitating competitive grant application review processes; conducting pre-award due diligence, issuing all awards and AmeriCorps State and National grants, ensuring AmeriCorps' compliance with governmentwide grantmaking requirements, and providing guidance and occasional training for grantee financial grants management activities (such as preparing Federal Financial Reports and closing out grants).

Grantee Interaction: Limited direct interaction beyond participation in AmeriCorps State and National's monthly grantee calls, sending occasional communications via AmeriCorpsOGA@cns.gov (this mailbox is not regularly monitored for incoming messages), and as requested by Portfolio Managers.

Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE)

Office Purpose: Responsible for conducting original and sponsored research and evaluations, supporting evaluations of grantees' research and programs, and promoting evidence-based service models.

Grantee Interaction:
The ORE Technical Assistance team will communicate with AmeriCorps State and National and Portfolio Managers regarding grantee needs and will facilitate trainings through NORC at the University of Chicago, a third-party independent research institution.

Best Practices for Planning Grantees

The following are suggested best practices for a successful planning year. Implement the practices that best meet the capabilities and needs of your program.

Engaging Key Stakeholders

Portfolio Manager: Portfolio Managers are equipped to clarify grant requirements, application instructions, etc. They can help think through the advantages and disadvantages of various program designs and specific program implementation plans and systems programs are considering or developing.

Fiscal Staff: Involve your fiscal staff in the planning of the program and in preparing an AmeriCorps budget and developing strong funds management systems. Setting up appropriate policies, procedures, and financial systems can be challenging and time consuming, even for grantees that are already familiar with AmeriCorps requirements and federal standards for financial grants management, so it's important to engage your accounting team and others who can help to ensure grant compliance.

Human Resources Staff: Engage your HR team in designing the screening, selection, and onboarding of AmeriCorps members and ensuring that all required AmeriCorps policies and procedures stated in the Terms and Conditions and federal regulations are implemented by your program.

Research and Evaluation Staff: Utilize existing data and reports from your program to inform the design and development of your Theory of Change and program model.

State Commissions: Once you know the states where you would like members to serve, contact those State Commissions as soon as possible to discuss your plans, learn about collaboration opportunities, and ask for information on the state laws that would impact the members in those states. It can take some time and follow-up to get the information you need. This consultation process is a requirement for all applicants.

Community Stakeholders/Advisory Committee: Assemble a committee of community members and internal stakeholders to provide your program with input and feedback throughout the entirety of the planning process.

Leveraging Support and Guidance

- Participate in regular check-in calls with your Portfolio Manager
  - Review resources and prepare questions in advance to get the most out of these discussions.
  - Schedule these calls following the AmeriCorps State and National sponsored trainings, so that you can use the time to ask any follow-up questions or utilize your Portfolio Manager to review drafts of any deliverables you may create based on the trainings.

- Use the planning period to get input and buy-in from your community stakeholders in

the development of the project. Begin the process of site recruitment and partner development early.

- Review successful AmeriCorps State and National applications
  - A list of all approved applications for new and recompeting applications will be published on [AmeriCorps Funded Grants](#) within 90 business days after all grants are awarded. Submitted program narratives, executive summaries, a blank template of the external review worksheet, a list of all external reviewers who completed the review process, and a summary of external reviewer comments for successful applications will be available upon request via email to [AmeriCorpsOGA@cns.gov](#). Further information about funded grants and subgrants is also available in [USASpending.gov](#).

- Ask individuals who are unfamiliar with your proposal to review your program grant application against the NOFO selection criteria. This way, you can get outsider opinions as to whether your plans are clear and compelling prior to submitting your application. AmeriCorps staff, including your Portfolio Manager, are not able to review or help you write your application.

Designing Your Program

- Spend time getting to know the [Regulations](#) and annual general and program specific [Grant Terms and Conditions](#). AmeriCorps grant requirements are complex even for grantees with prior experience with federal programs, and it is essential to keep AmeriCorps grant requirements in mind while planning the program.

- Use the fiscal year [AmeriCorps State and National Grants - Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)](#) and the Application Instructions to help guide the planning process. If you are utilizing a closed NOFO from a previous year for planning purposes, note that there may be minor changes to future NOFOs.

- Dedicate sufficient staff time to the development of the program. Although many resources exist to help new programs, AmeriCorps is simply not an "off the shelf" or "out of the box" type of program to implement and manage.

- Utilize your Portfolio Manager to connect with current AmeriCorps programs in your region to learn about their program designs, how they manage their projects, how they raise funds to support their programs, and whether there are opportunities for collaboration. Learning from a large variety of programs will support you in choosing or adapting a program design that will best meet your organization and community needs and will ensure that existing services are not being duplicated.
  - Visit the [FY 2022 AmeriCorps State and National list of funded grantees](#) to connect with programs outside of your region.

Planning a Strategy

Develop a planning timeline with specific benchmarks and deliverables and stick to it. The planning year will go by quickly and a detailed timeline will allow your program to be

prepared in the final months leading up to the application submission deadline.

Using Resources

Take advantage of the resources and templates on AmeriCorps.gov as you build your program. See Appendix A, Planning Grantee Resources, for an overview of available resources.

Benchmarks for Planning Grant Success

The following are suggested benchmarks for success during the planning year. Design a plan with your Portfolio Manager that best meets the capabilities and needs of your program.

Month 1: Introduction to AmeriCorps
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for your kickoff meeting

- ✓ [Setup your Litmos (AmeriCorps Learning Management System)](Setup your Litmos) account using the code "CNCS-Litmos"

- ✓ Take the [Key Concepts of Financial Grants Management e-course (Litmos)](link) and the [National Service Criminal History Check required e-course (Litmos)](link). Save a copy of your completion certificates

- ✓ In preparation for your kickoff meeting with your Portfolio Manager, review the following materials and prepare any questions for the meeting:
    - [AmeriCorps State and National General and Specific Grant Terms and Conditions](link)
    - [AmeriCorps Regulations](link)
    - [FY 2023 AmeriCorps State and National Competitive NOFO and Instructions](link)
    - [Key Concepts of Financial Grants Management e-course (Litmos)](link)
    - [National Service Criminal History Check required e-course (Litmos)](link)

- ✓ Check out the [Payment Management System (PMS)](link) and identify your PMS liaison contact info

- ✓ Assemble and begin meeting with an advisory committee and/or stakeholders who will be providing input on the planning process

- ✓ Begin preparing your systems for planning grant implementation (payroll, financial management, time tracking, monitoring and oversight tools, etc.)

Month 2: Begin Program and Budget Development
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

Program
- ✓ View [Theory of Change resource video](link) and [Performance Measures Curriculum (Module 2)](link) and begin developing a program Theory of Change

- ✓ Review the "How to Develop a Logic Model" resources and begin developing a program Logic Model to align with your Theory of Change:
  - [PowerPoint Presentation](), [Audio](), [Notes](), and [Example]()

- ✓ Review the [AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange]()
  - Determine what evidence-based intervention(s) can be utilized by AmeriCorps members to address a compelling community problem

- ✓ Consider the number of AmeriCorps members needed, slot type, and service activities
  - Review [AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities]() and [Nonduplication]() and [Nondisplacement]() Requirements

- ✓ Start to identify your potential community partners and service sites, or at least the criteria by which they will be selected

- ✓ Continue meeting with stakeholders to inform your planning

Budget
- ✓ View [AmeriCorps State and National Best Practices in Budget Development]()
  - Note: This training module was developed for the FY 2023 AmeriCorps State and National NOFO and requirements and guidance are subject to change

- ✓ Draft a program budget

- ✓ Identify potential in-kind and cash resources to support your program

Month 3: Continue Program Development
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

Program
- ✓ View [AmeriCorps State and National NOFOs Best Practices in Developing Performance Measures training module]() and the [National Performance Measurement Core Curriculum]()
  - Begin developing program performance measures
  - Draft strategy to measure program impact, including consideration of performance measures and data collection and aggregation plans
  - Note: This training module was developed for the FY 2023 AmeriCorps State and National NOFO and requirements and guidance are subject to change

- ✓ Review ["How to Fully Describe an Intervention"]() AmeriCorps guide and start drafting a well-defined intervention description including a well-specified target population

- ✓ Define stakeholder roles for program implementation and continue meeting with stakeholders for program planning input

- ✓ Determine program staffing needs for the program
  - Identify roles and responsibilities for each program staff member

- Develop an organizational chart for program staff

✓ Develop plans for member recruitment and selection
- Identify strategy for recruiting individuals from the communities your program will serve and from historically underserved, under-represented, and disadvantaged populations
- Review member eligibility criteria ([45 CFR 2522.200](#)) and [National Service Criminal History Check (NSCHC) requirements](#)
- Design member application and interview and selection processes

✓ If applicable, begin the consultation process with State Service Commissions of states where you plan to operate your program
- Not required for Native Nations grantees

Month 4: Continue Program and Budget Development
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

Program
✓ Design plan for host site recruitment and selection
- [Create service site agreements](#)

✓ Design [member service position descriptions](#) based on member service activities

✓ Develop detailed member training plan
- Identify topics, goals, and objects for member training, including orientation and ongoing training
- Determine cadence and timing of training

✓ Identify plan for member training and orientation

✓ Review the Overview of the [Uniform Monitoring Package (UMP)](#) and create a plan for compliance oversight to include:
- Host site orientation and training
- Plan for member supervision and regular supervisor training
- Site monitoring
- Staff and member timekeeping
- Member record keeping

Budget
✓ Secure cash and in-kind resources for the planning grant and begin receiving commitments for the implementation of the program

✓ Discuss member benefits with your Portfolio Manager and consider how you may be able to supplement member benefits in order to enhance the member service experience
- Connect with existing AmeriCorps programs regarding ideas for additional member benefits

Month 5: Finalize Program and Budget Development
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

Program
✓ Finalize Theory of Change and Logic Model

✓ Develop a program sustainability plan

Budget
✓ Finalize a draft program budget

Month 6: Finalize Program and Budget Development
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

Program
✓ Finalize your site selections

✓ Complete a site training plan

✓ Finalize all program plans

Budget
✓ Determine sources of match, both secured and proposed, to ensure you are prepared to meet your minimum match requirement. experience
  - AmeriCorps legislation permits the use of non-AmeriCorps federal funds for the grantee share of the AmeriCorps budget
  - The United States Department of Education issued the [approval for Department of Education funds to match AmeriCorps awards](). You should check with your federal funder(s) for approval to use non-AmeriCorps federal funds for the grantee share of the AmeriCorps budget

Month 7: Draft Application
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins.
Keep in mind your Portfolio Manager cannot review draft application materials or provide explicit information regarding the content of your application.

✓ Ensure your eGrants account is active and all necessary users for grant submission have created an account

✓ Complete at least one draft of your program grant application

✓ Receive feedback on your application from stakeholders

Month 8: Finalize Application and Submit
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins.
Keep in mind your Portfolio Manager cannot review draft application materials or provide explicit information regarding the content of your application.

✓ Complete another draft of your grant application

✓ Begin to input your application into eGrants. Make sure you have backup copies of your application content saved in case you encounter any technology issues in eGrants.
- By the end of December, it is suggested that you have submitted your grant application (typically due to AmeriCorps in early-January; check the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the exact deadline)

Month 9: Begin Program Planning
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

✓ Begin preparing your systems for program implementation (payroll, financial management, time tracking, monitoring and oversight tools, program evaluation tools, etc.)

✓ Begin working on an AmeriCorps operational policies and procedures manual for your program

✓ Developed detailed member orientation and training plans

Months 10-12: Complete Program Planning
Meet with your Portfolio Manager for at least two check-ins

✓ Complete work on forms and templates to support program implementation (member service agreement, site agreement, member timesheet, etc.)

✓ Finish preparing your systems for program implementation (payroll, financial management, time tracking, monitoring and oversight tools, program evaluation tools, etc.)

✓ Develop an AmeriCorps policies and procedures operational manual for your program

✓ Develop detailed member orientation and training plans

✓ Create a staff transition plan

Appendix A: Planning Grant Resources

Attend the AmeriCorps State and National Symposium

- Symposium is AmeriCorps State and National's annual grantee convening which will be taking place in summer, 2023 in Washington, DC. Grantees will come together to receive training on key topics, network and share best practices, and receive updates on AmeriCorps policies.

Review AmeriCorps State and National Resources

- Select "Grantees and Sponsors" on the toolbar on AmeriCorps.gov and then select "State and National Direct Grantees." This page provides a variety of resources and Agency updates. We recommend checking out the following pages in the Resources section:
  - View Terms and Conditions: Links to General and Program Specific Terms and Conditions
  - View Governing Authorities and Guidance: Read Agency statutes, regulations, and legislation
  - Access Program Tools: Program startup resources and training, including ASN New Direct Program Checklist and ASN New Direct Program Resource Guide
  - Access eGrants Instructions: Instructions for setting up and managing your eGrants account
  - Recruit Members: Tools for creating your member service opportunity listing and spreading the word about your opportunity
  - Manage Members: Templates for member position descriptions, member service agreements, service site agreements, timesheet outlines, and more!
  - Establish Performance Measures: Resources for writing your performance measures and the agency's AmeriCorps National Performance Measurement Core Curriculum

Review Fiscal Management Trainings

- Learn managing your planning grant and funds management. Setup your Litmos (AmeriCorps Learning Management System) account using the code "CNCS-Litmos".
  - Fraud Awareness Training for AmeriCorps Grantees
  - AmeriCorps Grantee Training: Ensuring Correct and Supported Salary Allocation
  -
  - Understanding Funds Management and the Unexpended Funds Process
  - Federal Financial Report (FFR) Training for Grantees

Review Evaluation Resources

- Access the [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation page](#) for resources

Appendix B: ASN Planning Grant Checklist

This resource has been adapted from Serve Rhode Island's Program Development and Planning Grant Checklist

Purpose and Instructions

The Planning Grant Checklist provides recommended activities and milestones for an AmeriCorps planning grant period or supports the development of an AmeriCorps program. Enter your target date for completing each milestone or activity. If you are not planning to conduct a particular activity, please put "N/A" in the anticipated completion date column. Utilize the "Status" column to detail progress or information to be shared.

Theory of Change and Logic Model

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Identify the **PROBLEM(s)** you plan to address?		
Identify the data that supports the existence of this problem? Specific, recent, local data is best.		
Identify the resources and community assets that already exist to address the problem?		
Identify the **INTERVENTION** (activities – what is done, with whom and at what dosage) to be delivered by AmeriCorps members and/or community volunteers?		
Identify any, activities/services members perform in addition to the primary intervention.		
Identify the number of and type (ex. Full Time 1700 hours, Minimum Time 300 hours etc.) of AmeriCorps positions.		

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Develop a rationale for utilizing AmeriCorps members (specifically) to deliver your intervention.		
Describe the **OUTPUT**(s) from the INTERVENTION. Do they align with an AmeriCorps National Performance Measure?		
Describe the **OUTCOME**(s) (measurement of change) from the INTERVENTION. Do they align with an AmeriCorps National Performance Measure?		
Write a one-page **EVIDENCE** statement on why this INTERVENTION will address the PROBLEM. Cite published evaluations if applicable.		

AmeriCorps Budgets

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Determine the award type for your program (Cost Reimbursement, Fixed, Education Award Only, Professional Corps).		
Estimate the size of the grant award referring to the NOFO instructions.		
Determine the living allowance, if any, to be provided members.		
Complete a draft budget, including • Adequate personnel FTE to manage the program; • AmeriCorps service gear; • Consider member travel • Member FICA		

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
• Member healthcare (for full-time members)		
Commonly overlooked costs: Background checks for staff and members, worker's compensation, travel for members to training events, staff professional development, training for site supervisors, health care costs for FT members. Make sure these are included, as appropriate, in your budget.		
Identify the **SOURCE OF MATCH FUNDS**. Agree as an organization whether the AmeriCorps program fits your overall budget and priorities.		

Service Partners

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Form an Advisory Committee/Board. Define their mission/goals and their meeting schedule.		
Identify partners and host service sites. • If using a site application process, develop an application, review process, and selection criteria.		
Write a plan for replacing service sites that back out.		
Identify the number of members for each site.		
Determine how much financial support or in-kind valuation sites will contribute.		
Write a list of responsibilities for on-site supervisors.		
Develop template service site agreement, MOU to outline responsibilities, or expectations, including AmeriCorps		

Prohibited Activities, AmeriCorps brand identity, Terms and Conditions, and data collection.		
Orientation and training plan for service site supervisors, including expectations, role in member discipline, role in member time tracking, role in data collection, and AmeriCorps prohibited activities.		

AmeriCorps Member Recruitment and Selection

Activity/Milestone	Target Date	Status
Define minimum requirements and desired characteristics for members in your program.		
Write a Member Position Description.		
Write a member recruitment plan. Does the plan include how you will recruit diverse members into your program?		
Identify reasonable accommodations that would allow members with disabilities to serve.		
Design application materials. Do they include information about eligibility and National Service Criminal History Checks?		
Develop a screening and interview process for all candidates.		
Describe how members are placed at service sites.		
Write policies and procedures for how you will complete National Service Criminal History Checks on applicants (and staff).		

AmeriCorps Member Supervision

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Plan for bringing the members together regularly.		
Plans for visiting member sites.		
Written templates for mid- and end-of-term evaluations for members.		

AmeriCorps Member Training

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Specific training needs for your members, related to their service site (Examples: child development, construction, financial literacy education, etc.)		
Member orientation schedule and training plan that includes the following: • Rights and responsibilities • Code of conduct • Prohibited activities • Drug Free Workplace Act • Suspension/termination • Grievance procedures • Sexual harassment and discrimination • Child and vulnerable populations protection if applicable • National Service History and role of AmeriCorps		
Training in AmeriCorps identity		

Training in life after AmeriCorps, career development.		
Establish a year-long training calendar.		
System in place to assess training outcomes (members' change in knowledge or behavior, member satisfaction, member confidence, etc.)		
Tutoring Programs Only • Has the program addressed requirements for recruiting/selecting tutors? • Have you ensured that your training curriculum meets the requirements for tutoring programs? • Have you defined tutoring standards? What are they? • Have you ensured that the supervisors meet the requirements for tutoring programs?		

Data Collection and Integrity

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Written data collection plan that identifies all data points needed for each performance measure.		
Data collection tools.		
Training plan for staff and members on data collection and quality.		
Establish a plan to ensure ongoing data integrity and storage as required by AmeriCorps		

Broader Community Engagement

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
A public awareness campaign to educate the community about your program.		
Developed a brochure or other outreach materials describing your program.		
Plans to participate in National Days of Service, including MLK Day of Service, 9/11 Day of Service, and AmeriCorps Week.		
Plan for non-AmeriCorps (community) volunteer generation. How will volunteers be managed, trained, and tracked?		
Plan for integrating the AmeriCorps program into your agency's overall mission/vision?		
Plan for securing resources to increase your match in future grant years.		

Systems for Member Engagement

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Member Service Agreement template. • Position description • Term type (minimum # hours) and start/end dates • Drug Free Workplace policy • Discipline, suspension, and termination policies • Specific terms about release for cause and for compelling personal circumstances • Grievance procedure		

• Nonduplication/nondisplacement • Civil Rights and Harassment policy • Background check clause (what will exclude members from service) • Prohibited activities		
A member handbook.		
Identify a plan for conducting National Service Criminal History Checks-consider creating Truescreen and Fieldprint accounts.		
Review resources on the AmeriCorps member enrollment process.		
Procedures in place to obtain necessary documentation for: • Background checks • Health care enrollment/waiver • Child care benefits • Media consent release • Proof of meeting citizenship requirements • W4 and Tax forms		

Organization Systems

Activity or Milestone	Target Date	Status
Position description developed for program staff.		
Forms to document monitoring service sites.		
Has a system been developed for monitoring and tracking financial aspects of the program? Systems should:		

• Separate AmeriCorps records by grant year • Document actual expenses/match, not budgeted amounts • Ensure that unemployment is not paid for members • Withhold income tax and FICA from member living allowance • Cover members in worker's compensation plan • Distribute living allowance evenly and not on an hourly basis		

Appendix C: Resources for Education Programs

- The Superintendent's Toolkit provides examples of interventions and is a good example to share with potential partners/schools/districts that are unfamiliar with AmeriCorps.

- National Partnership for Student Success

- National Service 101 for Afterschool Providers

- The United States Department of Education issued approval for Department funds to match AmeriCorps awards