

Grant Selection Process Report to Full Commission

Legal Applicant: University of Maine System **Program name:** Lifelong Maine AmeriCorps Program

Recommendation:

Reviewers: **TF:** L'Italien, Nixon **Peer:** Martel, Trowbridge, Filippo

Grant Category: ☒ Formula ☐ Competitive **Performance Period:** ☒ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☐ Year 3
☐ Other Competition
Type: ☐ Operating ☐ Planning **Start/End Date:** 09/01/2021 to 08/31/2024
☒ Fixed Amount ☐ Ed Award Only

ME Priority Area: Public Health **Fed Priority Area(s):** [N/A]

Request for New Resources		CNCS	Local
New CNCS Funds:	\$133,497	Cost sharing proposed	%
Match Committed:	\$n/a	Min. Match required	0 %
Total Grant Budget:	\$		
Cost Per Member:	\$16,300 of \$16,300 allowed		

	FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT
AmeriCorps Member Service Years:					8.19
Slots with living allowance	5	3			8
Education Award only					

Total prior years with CNCS funding: [0 AmeriCorps; 0]

Prior experience with CNCS funding:
The proposal is from the Center on Aging which is part of UMaine. All applications from this campus come in under the UMaine System ID. This is the applicant's first submission for AmeriCorps funding. The Center on Aging has operated two Senior Corps programs for over 10 years: Senior Companions and RSVP. Senior Companions has eligibility criteria and provides participants with a tiny stipend (\$2.65/hour) for 20 hours of service. It requires National Service Criminal History Checks of all volunteers and staff. RSVP is a flexible program for the volunteer. Placements are in nonprofit and public agencies to do a wide-ranging set of assignments. Volunteer hours are much more like community volunteers – hours and length negotiated with volunteer and organization. There is more similarity between Senior Companions and AmeriCorps.

Statement of Need (from application narrative): *Note- the applicant uses APCI to mean Age-friendly Community Initiative throughout the proposal.*

Maine is the oldest and most rural state in the US. Overall, 29% of Maine's population is age 60 or older; 65% of older residents live outside urban areas (Ref. 1). Growing older in rural Maine can be challenging especially when the social, physical, service, and municipal environments are not easily accessible. Maine's age-friendly community initiatives (AFCIs) work to make their municipality conducive to older resident's health, well-being, and ability to age in their long-time homes and communities. Launched in 2012, when the first Maine municipality joined the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC). Maine's age-friendly movement has grown to encompass 82 active AFCIs, with 72% operating in rural areas. The majority (57%) are volunteer-led and all depend on older volunteers to organize, plan, and implement changes (Ref. 2). Each stage in the community change process requires different skills and capacities. An APCI may have sufficient capacity to conduct a community assessment or develop an action plan but lack the capacity to act on major areas of concern for aging in the community, such as transportation, housing, food security, or accessible wellness activities.

The challenges of implementing changes in Maine's AFCIs have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even after vaccines were made widely available, many older residents are reluctant to volunteer or attend indoor gatherings. As a result, Maine's AFCIs are struggling to resume the programs and activities offered pre-pandemic. As part of the planning process for this application, UMaine Center on Aging (CoA) had conversations with several AFCIs in Maine. Many emphasized the need for an AmeriCorps member to recruit volunteers, engage partners, and adapt pre-pandemic programming so that beneficiaries can feel safe participating.

In March 2021, UMaine CoA conducted a survey of Maine's AFCIs. Sixty-eight surveys were returned. The three top challenges identified were: (1) recruiting, training, and managing volunteers (84%); (2) engaging new partners (76%); and (3) re-vamping APCI programs that faltered during the COVID-19 pandemic (57%). Our members will play a critical role in community and volunteer engagement, recruiting partners, and adapting and implementing programs so that residents can participate safely, which will bring the community together, post-pandemic, to enhance the environment for healthy aging.

Program Summary (from application):

The UMaine Center on Aging proposes to have 16 AmeriCorps members [(5) 1700-hour, (3) 900-hour, and (8) 300-hour stipended] who will provide direct services that will expand or enhance services, programs, or activities in lifelong, age-friendly communities throughout Maine. As a consequence of these efforts, multiple locations throughout Maine will realize increased and revitalized citizen engagement across the life span in the communities served by the targeted lifelong, age-friendly community initiatives. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps program will have (1) engaged at least 18 new partners in lifelong/age-friendly community initiatives in Maine; and, (2) improved capacity for lifelong, age-friendly communities to deliver services and engage residents. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 30 or more community volunteers who will be engaged in delivering services (e.g., volunteer transportation or social engagement programming) developed by a local age-friendly, lifelong community initiative. The CNCS investment of \$133,497 will leverage \$20,000 in state and local funds, \$8,500 in public funding, and \$30,500.00 in private funding.

Identified partners:

- Area Agencies on Aging,
- past Lifelong Community Fellows,
- AARP Maine,
- Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services
- Maine Community Foundation
- APCI leaders from 8 Maine communities, and
- CNCS programs including RSVP and SCP

Proposed Host Sites:

Age-friendly Community Initiatives - Blue Hill Peninsula regional APCI, Cranberry Isle, Danforth, Dexter, Dover-Foxcroft, Millinocket, and Saco

SCORING DETAIL

I. Summary of Peer Reviewer Consensus Scores

CATEGORY	Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need	Strong	5
Intervention	Adequate	3.75
Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model	Adequate	22.5
Notice Priority	Adequate	0.75
Member Experience	Adequate	6.75
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	9
Compliance and Accountability	Strong	5
Culture that Values Learning	Adequate	3.75
Member supervision	Adequate	4.5
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Weak	12.5
TOTAL		73.5
Evaluation Plan	Strong	
Recommend for further review with hesitation		

II. Summary of Task Force Consensus Rating and Final Score:

Category	Rating	Numeric Score
Program Alignment & Model		
Alignment of community need targeted and funding priorities	Strong	3.75
Extent to which proposal will serve specified communities and add to diversity of Commission's portfolio	Adequate	2.81
Proposal is innovative use of AmeriCorps and might be replicated	Strong	3.75
Evidence the program can be sustained beyond initial start up	Adequate	2.81
Proposal is from a partnership/coalition whose members are working together on program implementation	Adequate	3.75
Past Performance	Adequate	15
Financial Plan	Adequate	11.25
Fiscal Systems		
Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements	Strong	8.33
Strength of organizational financial mgt practices as evidenced by audits, etc.	Strong	8.33
Strength of sponsor orgs financial status/stability per audit, 990, etc.	Strong	8.34
Grant Readiness	Strong	20
GTF Review Total:		88.13

III. Final Combined Score

Total	161.6 of 200 possible
--------------	-----------------------

Final Assessment of Application:

☒ Fund with no Corrections
 ☐ Fund with Corrections
 ☐ Do Not Forward to National Competition

Final Recommendation of Grant Selection and Performance Task Force:

Fund the proposal from the UMaine System at the levels requested for money and positions.

Referenced Conditions/Corrections:

- Source of Funds information must be updated.

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED

Section: Program Design (50 %)

Need

- The applicant shows a strong statement of need through external research and a local Advisory Group. The members of the Advisory Group work within the area of proposal and represents a variety of programs and backgrounds. There was background information provided about like programs, which was backed up with data.
- One grammatical error and all the anacronyms confusing, it distracts from the argument.
- Clear and concise, direct survey of engaged community drives the needs assessment.
- Even during pandemic, had a solid community engagement strategy.
- This project is new even though the institute is long-standing. Doesn't seem to have the grassroots connections needed in this proposal or at least it is not evident.

Intervention

- All criteria were adequately addressed.
- Including key partners, weekly schedule, and alignment with community needs, and community volunteer involvement" here seems out of place. Should it be in "staffing and accountability"?
- Evidence-based, developed by experienced institution with community partnerships effectively engaged.
- How intervention aligns with community need is not well presented. Have to guess the alignment.

Theory of change, evidence of effectiveness, and logic model

- All points were addressed in this category.
- As above, the "Host community Prewrite and LMAP member contribution is better suited in another section.
- Again, directly driven by the community evoked needs, coupled with the demonstrated knowledge of the UMaine and AARP's Livable Communities initiative, with nationwide programs and knowledges.
- Pretty robust infrastructure on the ground with community networks and institution is going to shore up the infrastructure.
- Significant interest and structural knowledge is meeting something not quite as tangible – community impact. That is not aligned clearly with need. Logic model stayed general about impact on community.

Evidence of Effectiveness

- Data collection and usage was well planned. Questions to be used were included to show the type of data to be collected.
- Very strong, comes from years of evidence, coupled with the direct localized need in Maine from local groups responses.

Notice Priority

- The notice priority statement indicated that the program falls within the funding priorities of the CNCS and Maine Commission.
- Public/Mental health of the elderly is a major issue, and this program seems well positioned to tackle the issue head-on. With a well thought-out methodology and institutional backing and partnerships, there is limited risk involved in the funding of this project to meet its projected outcomes.

Member Experience

- Training includes AmeriCorps history and prohibited activities; mentors receive training on effective mentoring; members have regular check-ins that include additional training; mentors have monthly check-ins.
- 2 wk checkins, skills translating to future jobs, mentoring, mentor training, etc.
- Here, I think this group is well intentioned, with strong collaborators, evidence-based programmatic development, but I am still a bit unsure of the actual practical experience as it relates to rolling out this program. This could likely be overcome with adequate resources, which the institution can likely bolster with the help of AARP, but I did want to highlight this gap of experience.
- Training well described and the fact they are going to make sure the members/those doing the work know the rules is a strong point.
- Structural components of experience are well described. Not clear – recruitment strategy, ability to immerse the member in the community and connect. What is the link between leveraging the existing infrastructure and recruiting/supporting members.

Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)

Organizational Background and Staffing

- The organization has been in operation for 20 years, and received a planning grant to plan for this proposal. They used a state-wide advisory group to get input about the program. Policies and procedures were discussed with the advisory group, and the organization has confirmed interest of host sites that are well-established in the work that the proposal looks to support. The criteria for the on-site supervisor has been well thought out. Background and credentials of staff indicate experience with developing policies and procedures, staff recruitment and training, compliance monitoring, and federal evaluation criteria.
- Key personnel in central location not out to the regional or partner groups, ok , other groups history and general staffing mentioned in other locations
- The UMaine Center on Aging is primed for this work, given its' specific goals and initiatives. The staff are committed to enhancing the lives of those aging in the region and state, and this project is a community-oriented aspect of that commitment. Efforts such as these from institutions should be supported, as their staff are trained professionals who can give backbone and structure to the community-oriented efforts of this project.

Compliance and Accountability

- Personnel in charge of compliance and accountability are experienced, as stated above. A monitoring and oversight plan has been developed to ensure program compliance, and participant (member and those served) safety. Frequent check-ins will support this activity.
- Nice summary and then breakdown per position
- As a state-funded institution, the organization is well poised for a project such as this, with significant compliance and accountability measures already in place to meet the needs of regular state and federal funded programs.

Culture that values learning

- Data for decision-making is used regularly by the organization.
- There is clear evidence from the narrative that this group is committed deeply to the learning process in an iterative fashion. This helps overcome the limited experience the institution may have in the direct "grassroots" community initiative being proposed.
- Culture of organization is deeply committed to doing new and innovative work. Impressed by proposal's move to community engagement in order to get wholistic outcomes.

Member Supervision

- The program will be its own cohort with a dedicated "manager". This will allow for proper attention to be given to member supervision through check-ins with members, mentors, and host-site supervisors.
- The LMAP Coordinator may become a bit overwhelmed with such a massive undertaking, steps should be taken to ensure they are adequately supported at each stage of the program's process.

Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)

- The program is fully funded through the AmeriCorps grant. The narrative did indicate that the program will leverage state and local funds, public funding, and private funding. The involvement of the Maine Community Foundation is promising as far as their ability to get private funding. Source of funds list is blank so cannot tell what is confirmed and what is hoped for.
- This budget is entirely discreet, in that it asks specifically for the amount available for Membership funding from AmeriCorps without any proposed match from the grantee. This is not ideal, but seemingly overcome by the strong initiative proposal.
- Source of Funds section has no information so it is not possible to determine if there are sufficient resources to operate the entire program.

Section: Data Plan Feedback

- The plan was adequate. Covered all the necessary points.
- As the CoA at University of Maine has deep experience in data collection, this is a strong aspect of the application.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL 1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? Yes (3) No ()

Comments:

- The applicant has gone through a planning process and engaged the community-at-large in the design of the project.

- The experience of UMaine's COA with the LMAP cohort this past year has given them the community- oriented data and feedback to now leverage their depth of institutional knowledge and capacity, demonstrated clearly by their data collection procedure and theory of change narrative.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- Plans for local funding for the program.
- Overall the proposal is clear, I think there is some lacking in the community outreach experience side, knowing the demands of such a project. That being said, I believe this can be overcome.

TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:

Program Alignment and Model

- This application focuses on community-driven need to build capacity and support environments for age-friendly communities-a key issue for Maine. It's alignment to priorities is strong due to it's mostly rural implementation model and focus on aging issues. It's adequate in its attempts at ensuring diversity, Despite its focus on a mostly rural, aged population, the approaches should build the capacity of communities to respond to changing demographics. Being the that Age-Friendly Community movement is a designation recognized by both WHO and AARP, the project has extremely broad reproducibility across the US. By establishing partnerships with municipal governments, local and state non-profits, philanthropies, and other sources, of funding, the program should be able to sustain some of its efforts, albeit on a smaller scale than what is proposed in the application. The proposal is adequate in showing partnership and a common approach to a community problem but could be improved by shared effort with organizations whose missions focus on the 8 domains of livability mentioned in the proposal.
- The program has merit but the model does not appear innovative, like the mention of trying to recruit for diversity, would like to see this as a priority for every stage of the program and would like to know how much of this was involved in the original stakeholder input gathering of the program.

Past Performance

- Whereas the Center on Aging has just participated in a AmeriCorps Planning Grant, the University of Maine System has an extensive history of managing AmeriCorps programs with adequate results. The proposal suggests that the COA will continue in that tradition.
- They received a planning grant for this work, but they were able to illustrate that there is sufficient planning, network and capabilities.
- Could have explained experience with Senior Corps and whether it added to preparedness. Also didn't flesh out planning grant very much.

Financial Plan

- Being a fixed-cost proposal, it aligns the MSYs with the per MSY allocation. In the narrative it would have been helpful to see a breakdown of how both AmeriCorps and leveraged funds would be coordinated to create a comprehensive program.
- From my understanding of the budget requirements, this area could have had more details to specific match.

Fiscal Systems and Capacity

- The University's financial position as evidenced by its assets to liabilities, it's lack of substantial audit findings, and its history with AmeriCorps suggests that it will have no problem with financial management of this program.
- Strong indication of a financial management capabilities as offered in the survey.

Grant Readiness

- While this plan is intentionally vague about the specific actions it intends Members to take in each community it serves, it has done the formative work to make sure that the needs have been identified and the efforts will be locally driven based upon those needs. The goals are in alignment with the goals of AmeriCorps and the evaluation measures are very well thought out. The connection between UMaine COA, AARP, and local communities could be a model for implementation going forward with broad applicability across the US.
- Document indicates they are ready for this.