

Grant Proposal Report from Task Force to Full Commission

Recommendation: Forward only if corrections are negotiated

Kennebec Valley Community

Legal Applicant: Action Program/Educare Central
Maine

Program Name: First4 AmeriCorps

Total prior years with CNCS funding: [3]

Prior experience with CNCS funding: This applicant is just starting its third year as a Commission Formula program. In order to expand and work with Child Development Services, it needs to move to the Competitive category. The federal funding priority for Education does mention youth in foster care but targets an older age range. This pre-k age range has youth in care as well as youth with disabilities but focuses on helping youth be ready to learn. Hopefully the federal agency will be open to this.

Grant Category:	<input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Competitive <input type="checkbox"/> Other Competition	Performance Period:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Year 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Year 3
Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> Cost Reimbursement <input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fixed Price <input type="checkbox"/> Ed Award Only	Start/End Date:	<u>08/20/2022 to 08/19/2025</u>
ME Priority Area:	[n/a]	Fed Priority Area(s):	<u>Education</u>

Requested Resources: Funds and Slots (if Fixed Amount, only complete CNCS award amount)

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	n/a		n/a
Member Support	n/a		n/a
Indirect (Admin)	n/a		n/a
CNCS Award amount	\$ 265,896	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	n/a
% sharing proposed	n/a		n/a
% share required	n/a		n/a
Cost-per-member proposed	\$21,600 (\$ 21,600 max. allowed)		

	AmeriCorps Member Service Years: <u>12.31</u>					
	FT	3/4T	HT	RHT	QT	MT
Slots with living allowance		5	10	10		
Education Award only						

Statement of Need (from application narrative):

As of 2019 there were 248,624 children under the age of 18 living in Maine. Of those, 34,300 (13.8%) live in poverty, 94,477 (38%) qualify for free and reduced lunch, and 12,622 (5.3%, as a % of children ages 0-17) live in "deep poverty," a term referring to a family income that is below 50% of the federal poverty level (\$26,200 for a family of four). Kennebec Valley Community Action Program and Educare Central Maine (KVCAP/ECM) serve the areas of northern Kennebec and Somerset County, where 13.8% and 22.6% respectively, of children are considered to be living at or below the federal poverty line, with top health concerns in the community ranging from substance abuse and rural isolation to mental health concerns and physical abuse and neglect.

In the 2020-2021 school year, KVCAP/ECM served 514 children ages 6 weeks to 5 years at our sites and partner locations. Approximately 80% of those children are enrolled in our Head Start, Early Head Start, or Early Head Start:Child Care Partnership program as "disadvantaged" children with one or more of the following criteria: a history of trauma,

social/emotional challenges, developmental disabilities, family income eligibility below Federal Poverty Guidelines, in the custody of the state, homeless and/or receiving public assistance such as SNAP or TANF. To break this number down more specifically: 13% of the children at Educare Central Maine and its KVCAP partnership sites are in state custody, living in foster care placements, and 17% were identified as eligible to receive disability services through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). At ECM alone, 20% of the children enrolled require IEP/IFSP support. Greater than 30% of children within the catchment area of Child Development Services' (CDS) York and Cumberland sites require individualized support for identified disabilities, and 63% of the children enrolled at the CDS sites in those counties come from families whose income is at or below the federal poverty level.

Additionally, mental health is a significant concern for many families in Maine. Among the states, Maine has the third highest rate of diagnosed depression and the highest rate of anxiety amongst children under 18 years of age. The Maine Kids Count data indicates that 20.2% of children under 18 have experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), a term that refers to the various forms of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction that children face in their home environments. Research has shown that ACEs cause sustained toxic stress, leading to emotional and behavioral challenges as children grow, and, into adulthood, poor socioeconomic outcomes as well as "diseases of despair" such as substance abuse and suicidality.

ACEs are often generational due to a parent/caregiver's own traumatic childhood or history of neglect or abuse, lack of understanding of children's needs and development, and/or lack of education. Children in KVCAP/ECM's program typically enroll with two or more of these traumatic experiences having already occurred in their young lives, and the majority of children enrolled in CDS's York and Cumberland counties sites have diagnosed developmental disabilities or come from low-income families. Trauma and learning struggles manifest as behavior that classroom staff spend the majority of time managing, which leaves less time to focus on instruction and school readiness skills. When the youngest among us are faced with such disadvantages early in life, their ability to learn and be successful in school are severely impacted. In fact, research indicates that disadvantaged children enter Kindergarten well below their better-resourced peers, and that gap is incredibly difficult to bridge. However, with resilience, children can triumph over trauma and adversity.

Resilience is paramount, as it is the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened--or even transformed-- by the adversities of life. Reducing toxic stress, learning to self-regulate, and fostering positive, responsive relationships are all protective factors that boost resilience--and are goals of the proposed program.

Program Description (executive summary):

Kennebec Valley Community Action Program and Educare Central Maine, in partnership with the Department of Education's Child Development Services, proposes to have twenty-five (25) AmeriCorps members who will directly support children in Head Start/Early Head Start/Child Development Services classrooms as they develop foundational social-emotional skills necessary for school readiness. At the end of the program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for growth shown in children's pre- and post-assessments in the School Readiness Goals benchmarks, particularly in the social-emotional domain, using the child development assessment tools. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage twelve (12) community volunteers who will be engaged in adding diverse skills and experience to the programs. This program will concentrate on the AmeriCorps focus area of Education, specifically improved school readiness for disadvantaged young children. The AmeriCorps investment of \$265,896 will leverage \$289,350 in Local/State funds.

Identified partners:

- Child Development Services
- Maine Dept. of Education

Service locations/Host sites:

25 Head Start/Early Head Start and Child Development Services classroom locations in Cumberland, Northern Kennebec, Somerset, and York Counties.

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

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 300

OUTCOME: ED23A: Number of children demonstrating gains in school readiness
 Proposed target: 270

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

OUTPUT: TBD
 Proposed target: TBD

OUTCOME: TBD
 Proposed target: TBD

CAPACITY BUILDING

OUTPUT: TBD
 Proposed target: TBD

OUTPUT: TBD
 Proposed target: TBD

Scoring Detail:

Peer Reviewer Consensus Score. *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring. The break downs within categories are from federal agency and change annually.*

	Score
Program Design	
Theory of Change & Logic Model	24 (Strong)
Evidence Tier (matches federal tier of <u>Pre-preliminary</u>)	3
Evidence Quality	6 (Adequate)
Notice Priority	0.75 (Adequate)
Member Experience	5 (Strong)
Organizational Capability	
Organizational Background & Staffing	6.75 (Adequate)
Compliance/Accountability	2.5 (Weak)
Culture that Values Learning	2.5 (Weak)
Member Supervision	6 (Strong)
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	18.75 (Adequate)
Evaluation Summary or Plan (assessed as <u>not submitted</u> but no points given for this component)	n/a
Total Peer Reviewer Score	75.25

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Rating	Score
Program Model		
Alignment of community need targeted and funding priorities	Adequate	2.81
Extent to which proposal will serve specified communities and add to diversity of Commission's portfolio	Strong	3.75
Proposal is innovative use of AmeriCorps and might be replicated	Adequate	2.81
Evidence the program can be sustained beyond initial start up	Strong	3.75
Proposal is from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together	Adequate	3.75
Past Performance		
Can comply with requirements, info consistent with other grant administrator's info, consistent with externally verified past performance	Strong	5
RECOMPETE ONLY: applicant used member positions	Adequate	3.75
RECOMPETE ONLY: used financial resources allocated	Strong	5
RECOMPETE ONLY: implemented program effectively	Strong	5
Financial Plan		
Plan anticipates operational costs and provides sufficient resources to implement program	Adequate	11.25
Fiscal Systems		
Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements	Strong	8.33
Strength of orgz 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		
The applicant's systems, policies, experience, partnerships, leadership support, financial + personnel resources, etc. are fully prepared to implement the program as of start date.	Strong	20
Total Task Force Score		91.88
Peer Review Score		75.25
Final Score for Applicant (max score is 200)		167.12

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward Application to National Competition with no corrections/modifications
- Forward to National Competition if corrections/modifications made
- Do Not Forward to National Competition

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- Evidence section refers the reader to websites rather than providing citations. Peer reviewers are not permitted to look at anything but narrative for this level of evidence so this weakness needs to be corrected.

Peer Reviewer Comments Compiled:

Program Design

- Theory of Change and logic model
 - Program is based on known needs as defined by DOE (teachers in classroom support and disadvantaged/developmental disability children ability to develop socially and be ready for school. using a model of a similar program that had previous success in school systems. The program benefits both the student and the AmeriCorps member - The program has been designed to target a sector (young preK, K and ones with

development disability and the AmeriCorps members will be used to implement the program- Desired outcomes have been identified in the short term, mid term and long term. These all look reasonable and measurable.

- Hesitation is that the age targeted is not within the federal funding priority description. They will serve children in care.
- They did not include explicitly where the members would be placed. The narrative includes all of the below assessment criteria in full detail. It does not exceed this. The logic model is done well, and specifically notes the lack of robust volunteer systems within their organization and community. KVCAP notes that 10% of member time will be devoted to building such a program. However, will there be long-term follow-up with the students or how evaluations will continue in years following the students' involvement in the program.
- Evidence Tier
 - The program is similar to a previous program run by the applicant but targets a different sector of the population. KVCAP-ECM utilizes Conscious Discipline which is a learning methodology recognized by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices as well as incorporating DOE's Zones of Regulation framework which is based on clinical research and evidence in social-emotional theories. The process is back up by several studies as mentioned in the narrative.
 - There are not specific studies that this program is replicating in their interventions. Their own first three years of the First4 AmeriCorps Program had successful results, but the interventions as a whole have not been studied.
- Evidence Quality
 - The evidence is preliminary but contains support documentation based on a similar program run by the applicant using methodologies proposed for this program. The methodologies were based off clinical studies and scientific and developmental research that was recognized by NREPP. The measurement tool is from the DOE ED23A and the data from a similar program run by the applicant is from 2019/2020.
 - The narrative notes that evidence exists but it does not go into detail about it. Further, when looking at Conscious Discipline and the Zones of Regulation, there were no citations or mention of where that information may be found, but merely a sentence saying that additional information may be found on their websites.
 - Data report submitted cannot be considered. Data about performance should be in the narrative.
 - Relevance of evidence not discussed. Sending reviewers to web site is not reasonable tactic. In fact, RFP (pg 37) notes that they should provide citations for studies described and that reviewers will not look at any documents or sources outside the application.
- Notice Priority
 - The Notice of Priority is fairly short and left out one of the targeted groups mentioned elsewhere in the narrative.
 - The Notice of Priority fits the AmeriCorps Education and its priority including improved school readiness and educational outcomes for the economically disadvantaged and well as improving behavioral outcomes in low achieving schools.
- Member Experience
 - Throughout the narrative there were reference for AmeriCorps members to gain training, certifications and experience. The member would be working with an assigned resource and would be shadowing in the classroom. The program stated it will foster an inclusive culture and would work with volunteers from the community.
 - This information was noted in the Rationale and Approach section, as well as the logic model, but not in a specific section devoted to "Member Experience." In fact, "Member Experience" is only found once within the document. There is a substantial amount of information and positives in this section, and thus it is still noted as Adequate, but believe a section devoted to this would make it Strong.
 - Need to pull together the pieces in one place for better clarity and stronger presentation.

Organizational Capability.

- Organizational Background and Staffing
 - In the narrative the roles, responsibilities and structure of the staff was presented. The project Manager has had previous AmeriCorp program experience, A new co-ordinator is to be hired. KVCAP/ECM Education Manager will supervise and Guide the Project Manager

- The applicant already has experience in what should be expected of the staff implementing the program and therefore submitted a thorough explanation for organizational background and staffing. They met the assessment criteria listed below but did not exceed that.
- Given they are operating a program, ability of staff wasn't discussed.
- Compliance/Accountability
 - They seemed to repeat back the criteria for assessment but did not describe what their process/procedures are or will be. Accountability not evident.
 - There was not a significant amount of information included within this section. There was no substantial information regarding the policies in place and mechanisms to report activity, aside from the mention of Member Agreement and awareness of procedures and rules, and oversight of project manager & coordinator.
- Culture that Values Learning
 - The applicant in the narrative uses testing at various stages to monitor objective along with basic in class monitoring activity
 - The applicant was not explicit in what they mean by "basic monitoring activities" or other means of data collection. While they may certainly collect data, they were not explicit in how they use, collect, or disperse that information.
 - Organization's use of data in operational decisions or program improvement not discussed or referenced.
 - Discussed what program will do but doesn't describe systems they put in place over current grant.
- Member Supervision
 - Members will adhere to the risk management process that KVCAP/ECM has in place, which consists of background checks, medical clearance and reference checks. Member once cleared will then begin onboarding on policies, benefits, position descriptions, essential functions, prohibited activities, conduct expectations, communication channels, and the disciplinary process. They will learn about the population they will serve and the concept of community action. The program manager and co-ordinator will develop service plans and meet with the members and site mentors regularly though the year.
 - The member will be in the classroom with a Site Mentor and will have bi-weekly meetings led by the project manager and project coordinator. The member will go through a mid-term evaluation, which includes observations, evaluation check list and a self assessment.
 - The applicant did not specifically note when the policies and procedures would be reviewed, but the rest of their supervision explanation was descriptive and specific.

Budget Adequacy and Cost Effectiveness. (Reviewers consider the budget narrative and its formulas, accuracy, expense items as well as Source of Funds information.)

- This is a Fixed Amount Grant. The budget funding sources have been identified and the MSY is at the allowable.
- The budget was filled out but there was no narrative explaining any of it, nor does it explain where the local funds will be coming from. It also does not explain what the local match will be; that was only described in the introductory paragraphs.

Evaluation Plan. (If applicable.)

- Evaluation submitted late and not sent to peer reviewers. This is not part of scoring (worth zero points) so it does not impact total score.

Summary Comments

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

- The proposal is an AmeriCorps priority for education. The proposal addresses this need for the disadvantaged/educational challenged starting at the pre-K, Kindergarten and prepares for school readiness. The proposal gives a good description of how this program will be successful and has partnered with the Department of education which will have insure success of the program. oversite of the project is adequate and training for the member is strong. The member addresses a need of the disadvantaged/developmental disability in the classroom allowing the teacher/Mentor to focus on school readiness of the class.
- They have experience in the field and have been successful, as noted in their evidence section. As mentioned in the rationale and approach section, the communities they serve are clearly in need of this service but lacking in help in that regard. Based on their logic model, expanding volunteer capacity and building a more robust program for the

communities would lead to positive outcomes. However, I do believe to be successful in receiving the grant that they need to expand their research into methods of intervention and expand their budget section.

Unclear elements

- The program coordinator - there seems to be a long list of criteria. How is this position going to be filled and how long will they think it will take before it is filled.
- It is unclear what research their interventions are based in. I am sure that there is research out there that could be cited to strengthen their argument for the interventions they are offering. It is also unclear how they will be monitoring the members throughout their service.

Task Force Review Comments Compiled:

Program Alignment and Model

- Partners included Kennebec Valley Community Action Program and Educare Central Maine and the Dept of Ed came together to find a solution to address the lack of school readiness for Maine's young, and many disadvantaged, children. They have identified that social-emotional factors are holding these students back and having added capacity in the classroom to specifically address this.
- The applicant proposed to serve an underserved population within their already underserved constituency. Their model is replicable and looks beyond the focus of providing service to its constituency by further supporting the professional development of its members and developing a workforce which is in need across the State of Maine.
- Addresses education/school readiness and works with Head Start & teacher, and doesn't conflict with them
- The proposal falls within a focus area and touches on the COVID recovery priority, although primarily in regard to the members where the plan is to train and certify members for possible positions as education technicians, an area where there is a significant need for more folks given COVID's impact on education in general and education technicians in particular. The program appears to be focused on serving areas with a high number of individuals who are economically challenged and will focus on children in poverty. This is a continuation and expansion of an existing program that will now include direct participation of the State Department of Education. The program model is being adjusted to include some of the approaches adopted by the State. As such, while not particularly innovative, it does have the possibility of replication elsewhere in the state and through DOE efforts/programs. Program continuation: The program aligns well with the mission and served populations of this CAP agency. As with all CAP agencies, its Board is comprised of a wide representation from the service area and includes individuals who are served by the agency or eligible for receiving agency services, although this was not specifically called out in the proposal. It was mentioned in the staff report. The agency's finances appear to be sound and the effort is supported by State DOE, which would indicate a state interest in the program, its success, and its possible expansion. The agency utilizes many volunteer management BMPs.

Past Performance

- KVCAP successfully ran a similar program. While not the same program (so perhaps I was wrong in answering the above questions), they have run a similar program with success. Therefore, there is a proven foundation for implementing volunteer management.
- The applicant's past performance of AmeriCorp programs with its strong foundation in federal funds management indicate that it will likely be successful in this proposed initiative.
- Past performance effectively used resources & accomplished goals.
- As noted, the agency is seeking to expand an existing program and has experience in meeting AC grant accounting and reporting requirements as well as other program regulations. As a CAP agency it is familiar with and has the necessary policies, accounting systems, and experience to effectively operate a program within the AC regulations and requirements. It should be noted that the agency has struggled to meet grant performance requirements, largely as a result of the disruptions experienced throughout the education and early educational systems due to COVID impacts. Given that the situation is slowly moving toward a new normal, this should be less of an issue in future years, although that's hard to predict at the moment. At worst, it looks like we will somehow simply adjust to coexisting with COVID. The proposal meets the grant requirements with significant support from the State's Department of Education.

Financial Plan

- There was no narrative that would explain the budget or local match.
- The narrative for the financial plan could have elaborated more thoroughly on the management of the program and what resources, beyond supervision, that the organization would use to support successful implementation.
- Not sure of matching funds/in kind support, since not required for fixed amount but seems good.

- This is a fixed cost grant and the grantee has indicated that the local share has been committed by the State Department of Education.

Fiscal Systems

- The organization is in strong financial standing as the audit and the 990 show.
- The agency's history of compliance, broad array of Federal programming, and control indicate a likelihood of compliance in for this proposal.
- Appear to be better than adequate.
- The agency has the necessary systems in place and track and account for grant expenses in accordance with federal requirements. The audits are generally clean with several minor exceptions, some of which related to new programs and integrating them into existing systems. Based on my experience, this is not uncommon when federal programs are rushed into existence as has been the case with many COVID relief programs. Regulations or changes to regulations often appear after the fact and can create problems/issues. The overall finances of the agency appear strong.

Grant Readiness

- There are strong indicators (finances, running of a similar program) that the organization is ready to implement this on their start date. They know what they are getting into and have the means to pull it off.
- The agency has successfully implemented service programs in the past and appears to be drawing upon that experience to manage the proposed project.
- I believe they are ready and have prior experience.
- As noted, this is a continuation and expansion of an existing program where the basic structure and systems already exist. As a result, there should be no major difficulties in implementing the program. As I understand it, the current program has been managed well although it has suffered from the effects of COVID on childhood