

Grant Proposal Report to Commission from Task Force

Recommendation: Fund only if corrections can be negotiated

Legal Applicant: Maine Dept. of Education

Application ID: 22ES246894

Category: AC Formula -- Standard
 AC Formula – Rural State
 AC Competitive
 Other Competition

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area: Education, Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity, Capacity building

Commission Priorities: Public health, Workforce development

Applicant type: New (no prior AC experience)
 Re-compete (# of yrs: __)

Proposed Dates: 08/15/2022 to 08/14/2023
 Submitted budget is 1 year

Requested Resources: Funds and Slots (*indicates sections with calculation errors)

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	58,339		N/A
Member Support	N/A		N/A
Indirect (Admin)	Not budgeted		N/A
CNCS Award amount	\$ 58,339	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	N/A
% sharing proposed	100%		0%
% share required	100%		0%
Cost-per-member proposed	\$ N/A	RFP stated 6 mo planning grants could request max of \$30,000; longer (up to year) could request \$60,000.	

Program Description (executive summary): The Office of School and Student Supports at the Maine Department of Education proposes to develop an AmeriCorps program to serve York County, ME. It will address teacher shortages, mental health and well-being, and access to resources that impact the lives of students PK-12, parents/families, and school personnel in the AmeriCorps focus areas of Economic Opportunity, Education, Healthy Futures, and Capacity Building. The AmeriCorps federal ARP investment of \$60,000 will support planning activities carried out in collaboration with several other offices within the DOE – Early Learning Team, Educator Effectiveness, Higher Education, and Innovative Pathways - as well as potential post-secondary partnerships with the University of New England and York Community College.

Service locations:

TBD during planning.

Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.

DOE - Early Learning Team, Educator Effectiveness, Higher Education, and Innovative Pathways; University of New England and York Community College; Region 9 Superintendents; York County members of ME Curriculum Leaders; Biddeford/Sanford CTEs; YCCC; York County Head Start

Applicant proposes to deliver services:

Within a single municipality Within a single County but not covering the entire County
 County-wide in a single County Multiple Counties but not Statewide Statewide

A. Does the Executive Summary format exactly match the template in the RFP? Yes No

B. Does the applicant claim the rural preference? Yes No

C. If the applicant claimed rural preference, is it substantiated by target area? Yes No N/A

D. Does the applicant claim a preference because the application is from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together on a common goal? Yes No

E. Does the applicant claim a preference because the proposal is from an organization led by or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities and/or people. Yes No

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.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Program Design		
Need and Target Community(ies)	Adequate	11.25
Response to Need	Strong	15
Readiness for Planning	Strong	15
Expertise and Training	Adequate	3.75
Organizational Capability		
Organizational Background & Staffing	Adequate	18.75
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Adequate	18.75
Total Peer Reviewer Score		82.5

Recommend for Further Review

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

	Quality Rating	Score
Proposal Alignment and Model		
• Alignment with Funding Priorities	Strong	15
• Potential for innovation	Adequate	3.75
• Strength of evidence planning process will succeed	Adequate	11.25
Preferences from RFP Announcement (35%)		
• Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)	Incomplete/ Nonresponsive	0
• Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse	Adequate	3
• from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together	Adequate	6.75
• serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum	Substandard	2.25
• from an organization led by or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities and/or people	Substandard	2.25
Financial Plan	Adequate	11.25
Fiscal Systems		
• capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements	Strong	5
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial management practices	Adequate	3.75
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial status/stability	Strong	5

Total Task Force Score	69.25
Peer Review Score	82.5
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)	151.75

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward or fund with no corrections/modifications
- Forward or fund with corrections/modifications
- Do Not Forward or fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

The following proposal issues need to be clarified or, in the case of missing required elements, added.

- Proposal needs to be transferred to the correct federal application. It was submitted as a Fixed Amount proposal which provides reimbursement based on hours served by AmeriCorps members. Planning grants have not members. The funds used for this award do not require a match under Cost Reimbursement.
- The budget in cost reimbursement will increase slightly to cover the allowed indirect of 5%.
- The section on organizational capability needs to be edited to describe the organization applying rather than the lead planner. It is an opportunity for other issues to be addressed which are less critical.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design.

Need and Target Community(ies)

- While the need for educational staff in Maine schools is well documented and assumed, this section of the narrative did not provide specific data to detail the claims and the ramifications other than a reference to a programmatic staffing issue at a school/for a program. There was also a lack of specificity documentation of engagement with residents with regards to the "brainstorming". I am not entirely sure the details of how this planning grant will specifically accomplish the goal of teacher recruitment, based on this section of the narrative, assuming teacher recruitment is the goal. However, I see, holistically, the benefit of providing support to mentees and mentors involved in programs specifically designed to engage and encourage further educators-but again, I am assuming that this is the purpose as it does not seem clearly described in this section.
- This was a case of assuming common knowledge but they did not provide any evidence to document the needs. They make assumptions we will know things. In terms of a grant application, they barely made the case. Interesting because the Dept has all kinds of data that could have been used to describe.
- Target Community well defined. Addresses 2 well defined needs, but documentation of need is weak
- The narrative relies upon common knowledge relative to the teacher shortage within the State of Maine, though it derives its information from data collection within DOE that identifies the breadth of the problem within the State. Also, a TeachME program, motivated by the shortage, is expected to launch imminently to showcase teachers and generate additional interest in the profession. Similarly, the planning grant as written refers to the declining mental health and well-being of students post-pandemic. I do not dispute either of these claims, but no data was supplied to confirm either statement; an assumption was made that we, the reviewers, are aware of the extent of the problem. Additionally, the rationale for focusing on York County is not documented other than to say the SAUs within that geographic region have varying degrees of strength and need for opportunity. Since this is a pilot project, I have no objection to the selection of a county in which their collaborative networks are strong and bode well for the implementation of the plan. Assuming success, the DOE can extrapolate from that experience to apply to other counties. The idea for the planning grant was born of a conversation with the Head Start Director. Current mentorship programs exist in high schools throughout the region, and Career Days within those high schools promote the teaching profession. This program is differentiated from those, however, by virtue of the level of training provided to

mentors, the selection of particular mentors, and the incorporation of trauma-informed instruction. The application is very clear that the beneficiaries are school personnel, students, and parents.

Response to Need

- I see the effort and thought for the envisioned program clearly detailed but I am still unsure of the specific allocation and application of the planning grant i.e. the position(s), goals, duties, etc...My lack of understanding does not detract from the well thought out preparation for the proposed utilization of AmeriCorps members as part of the proposed program.
- Well defined plan to address needs. Plan is creative and kills 2 birds with one stone.
- The described need is addressed in the effort to attach AmeriCorps members to 12 SAU districts in York County with support, training, and trauma-informed practice for the purposes of: 1. Providing social-emotional support to students, educators, and mentors; 2. Attracting high school students to the field of education; 3. Attracting high school students to the AmeriCorps Program. Pre- and post-climate surveys of students and potentially parents will yield information, as will analysis of classroom data; however, data collection strategies for determining how many high school students enter teacher education programs or become AmeriCorps members upon graduation will need to be specified. Similarly, measurements for determining improved mental health and well-being need to be identified. Partners in the planning initiative, especially those with direct expertise, are listed and are numerous. Funders still need to be uncovered, but a plan to approach entities, such as chambers of commerce, and rotary and other service clubs, is mentioned.

Readiness for Planning

- I feel like the actual details of the lead planner's job description has been implied but not specifically outlined ... either that or I have totally skipped a section or paragraph. However, I can't seem to fault anything in particular in this section and feel persuaded to offer only positivity here.
- Applicant has strong planning and organizational background.
- The infrastructure is in place for the delivery of an initial plan, and ultimately a formal program, but additional resources are required to formulate the plan. The infrastructure runs the gamut from various units within the DOE to teachers in the classroom, as well as the Maine Curriculum Leaders and the Director of the Office of School and Student Supports. Currently the SAUs do not have the capacity to undertake the planning for the proposed program. The lead planner will be a new hire vested with the responsibilities for conducting surveys, analyzing data, networking with experts in the field, setting forth a vision for training, support, leadership activities for AmeriCorps members, and plans as to how to embed trauma-informed practices in their work.

Expertise and Training

- While adequate I caution the confidence with regards to the anticipated small scope of need for training or guidance. That being said I would lean heavily upon VM staff for their opinions and experience with the applicant/organization with regards to the expectation of need. I am also still confused as to whether this about providing mental health support to students or to increasing teacher/educator recruitment.
- Applicant has strong training/educational background. Good plan for member development.
- Again, an assumption is expected regarding the Department's appropriate knowledge of Theory of Change, Logic Models, evidence-based decision-making, establishing monitoring and documentation systems, etc., but there is no direct mention in the application itself. My rating is based upon the general knowledge that the Department has extensive experience in this area in its myriad grant application experiences.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- This section, to me, fails to detail the organization's experience level with engaging volunteers in its mission related services and the organizational capacity, etc...I can assume but it's not included. The applicant has certainly described their qualifications and capabilities in detail. And the enthusiasm is clear.

- Many collaborators with necessary skills/knowledge. Supervisor for intended new hire has not been identified.
- Text switches to first person and away from the organization. The criteria are asking about the organization rather than the author. The fact the author indicates there will be someone else doing the planning, it confuses the reader. Will the planning lead have the same experience? Won't the department's capacity be available?
- The applicant's expertise and experience are significant. She has 29 years in PK-high school, and 16 of those years in leadership with experience in hiring, training, supervision, supporting professional development in all content areas, budgetary management, and creating instructional coaching programs. The agency, in this case DOE, is well equipped to manage the collection and interpretation of data, as well as to undertake data-driven decision-making and the regular oversight of program implementation.
- Can infer the infrastructure is there in the organization.

Budget Adequacy and Cost Effectiveness. (CNCS no longer allows narrative for this section. They directed reviewers to consider the budget narrative and its formulas, accuracy, expense items.)

Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)

- I assume the allocations for various line items are accurate and appropriate.
- Reasonable cost for new hire. Budget listed as Fixed Amount. No AC members. Should be cost reimbursement.
- The budgetary construct is straightforward, if not a little spare on detail.
- Should be given credit for getting egrants to do something it wasn't intended to do.
- As a cost reimbursement grant, will they have the cash on hand to start the process and be reimbursed.

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 (0)

Comments:

- While I am still unsure about some details I feel the intent and strategy for implementing the program and the necessity of the planning grant is clear. The proposal clearly seeks to carry out specific Federal and State priorities.
- Applicant has strong planning and organizational background, Has strong training/education background, and is well connected to potential partners/collaborators.
- Given the adequacy of the described need, the response to the need proposed, the existing collaborative network to set the planning scheme in motion, the extensive advisory committee participating in the planning, the expertise and experience of the applicant and the applicant's agency who will lead or at least advise on the project, the elements are in place for a successful planning initiative, in my view.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- I am still unclear as to the details of the funded position's role and and expected outcomes. Maybe I expected more detail than I should-maybe I clearly overlooked it...While unclear I am in no way doubtful of the necessity and need of the proposal and the appropriateness of the application.
- Need is not well documented.
- None

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- I am overall very enthusiastic about this proposal, though I do not think I can say I am as enthusiastic as the applicant. However, I have concerns about the reliance upon the applicant being so integral to the proposal and while that caution may be easily alleviated I feel it is important to note. Also, I would defer to the counsel and guidance of VM staff with regards to any questions or concerns they may have with the application as proposed.

- Good proposal. Combination of career development/recruiting teachers with support for SEL is very creative. Good evaluation plan.
 - There is a general lack of specificity in the budget proposal, which is not uncommon in planning grant applications, but that fact does not diminish the relevance of the planning process and potential important outcomes as described.
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Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Proposal Alignment and Model.

- The applicant for this grant proposal seemed to be applying for the job. I'm not confident, that training students to be mentors to other students is the best option. Seems some of this work is for trained educators, not student mentors.
- The need aligns with the federal priorities of Education and Economic Opportunity, the later via its focus on interesting mentors in pursuing a career in education. It aligns with the Commission's priorities of workforce development and public health via its focus on mental health and social emotional learning.
- The program could be innovative in its dual approach of addressing student needs (mental health/sel) while working to expand the interest of high school student mentors in pursuing a career in education. While piloting in one county, if successful, the program could be expanded to other areas of the state, particularly if state DOE champions and supports this approach.
- The program aligns well with the DOE's overall mission and complements other Departmental efforts. Both through the Department and the primary staff member involved, relationships already exist with key elements of the educational system in York county. Non-K-12 based relationships may need to be expanded/developed.
- While there is a regional structure in place for the proposed partners, the extent to which the partners have been involved in preliminary discussions is not clear.
- MDOE is not familiar with or experienced in volunteer management and the proposal does not indicate the extent of such programs/experiences among partner districts in York County, although Maine School Districts generally lack significant programs in this area.
- While no local share is required, it is not clear that future financial support for the program will be available or available for all of the potential partner school districts. This will obviously need to be explored during the planning process.
- The MDOE is financially stable as a part of state government as are the school districts involved.
- The civil service leadership of the Department is fairly stable; however, political appointees are subject to change, particularly if a new Governor is elected this fall. Such changes can impact departmental programs and priorities.
- Education is in crisis when it comes to student and adult mental health, so the need is definitely there. While the proposed idea is good, it is not fundamentally innovative, but could easily be replicated. It is not clear if there is strong local buy-in for the initiative giving evidence that it will be successfully carried out, but given the need, it is assumed that there will be sufficient interest.
- Proposal needs to be edited to remove extensive section where author refers to self rather than organization – especially in section on organization's capability. Overall, poorly written (3x). There is potential but reviewers had to do a lot of reading between the lines and making deductions.

Preferences from RFP Announcement

- The proposal does not serve the identified communities; is not from a partnership or coalition although implying such a coalition will be created, does not propose serving rural counties, and is not from an organization lead or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities or people. It would, however, add to the commission's portfolio by providing service in an in-school educational environment.
- The applicant gives only a very basic description of the effort, its target audience, and the proposal is largely unsupported by empirical data. It would seem that the applicant assumed the reader will take it on good faith that it has done its due diligence.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- Program is proposing fixed cost.
- The costs are reasonable.
- Applicant filled out the incorrect proposal template. The proposal needs to be moved to the Cost Reimbursement template.

Fiscal Systems

- Applicant is a state agency with significant grant experience showing that its systems can comply with federal requirements. While some issues were identified in the department's single audit, this is not unanticipated given the number and range of federal grants managed.
- First, the department is not required to file a 990 given that it is a state government entity. It's audit indicated some findings that were not severe, but should be noted. DOE handles \$2B in funds, so it has substantial financial capacity.