

Planning Grant Proposal Report to Commission from Task Force

Recommendation: Forward or fund with corrections/modifications

Legal Applicant: Kennebec Valley Council of Governments

Application ID: 22AC249641

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

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area: Economic Opportunity

Commission Priorities: Workforce Development

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

Proposed Dates: 1/1/2023 to 10/31/2023
 Submitted budget is 1 year

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

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	\$59,619*		
Member Support			
Indirect (Admin)	2,055*		11,508*
CNCS Award amount	61,674	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	11,508
% sharing proposed	84.27%		15.73%
% share required	0%		
Cost-per-member proposed	n/a		

Program Description (executive summary):

Kennebec Valley Council of Governments proposes to develop an AmeriCorps program to serve Kennebec, Somerset, and Waldo Counties. It will address Regional Diversity that impacts the lives of Maine's Asylum Seekers and Immigrants, as well as general residents, in the AmeriCorps focus areas of Economic Opportunity and Workforce Development. The AmeriCorps Federal ARP investment \$60,000 will support planning activities carried out in collaboration with the Kennebec Regional Diversity Coalition, the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce, Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, and the United Way of Kennebec Valley. No AmeriCorps members will be needed to execute this plan.

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.

(1) Kennebec Regional Diversity Coalition; (2) the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce; (3) Kennebec Valley Community Action Program; and (4) United Way of Kennebec Valley.

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)	Strong	15
Response to Need	Strong	15
Readiness for Planning	Adequate	11.25
Expertise and Training	Adequate	3.75
Organizational Capability		
Organizational Background & Staffing	Adequate	18.75
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Weak	12.5
Total Peer Reviewer Score		76.25

Recommend for further review with hesitation.

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	Adequate	11.25
• Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)	Adequate	2.8
• Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse	Strong	3.75
• Potential for innovation and/or replication	Adequate	2.8
• Strength of evidence planning process will succeed	Adequate	2.8
Preferences from RFA Announcement		
• from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together	Adequate	7.5
• serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum	Strong	10
• from an organization led by or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities and/or people	Weak	5
Financial Plan	Adequate	11.25
Fiscal Systems		
• capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements	Adequate	3.75
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial management practices	Adequate	3.75
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial status/stability	Adequate	3.75
Grant Readiness	Adequate	11.25

Total Task Force Score	79.7
Peer Review Score	76.25
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)	155.95

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.

- Funding request must not exceed maximum grant amount (\$60,000)
- Budget errors in calculations and formulas must be corrected.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design.

Need and Target Community(ies)

- This proposal aims to support asylum seekers and immigrants to Maine.
- Describes workforce needs & benefits if immigration very well. Lots of good data to back up their claims.

Response to Need

- Because the services and housing are saturated in Southern Maine and Portland, this proposal explores the possibility of building infrastructure to encourage immigrants and asylum seekers to build their futures in the upper two-thirds of the state, where there is a greater possibility that municipalities have greater bandwidth to support this population.
- Very detailed description of AmeriCorps member activities.

Readiness for Planning

- The proposal makes clear that the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG) has done their homework to understand the challenges associated with providing housing and support to their targeted population. Further, the proposal is aligned with KVCOG's Impact 2032 plan in which the organization aspires to shift from a municipal-membership framework towards growth and regional capacity which will compound effectiveness.
- Does not appear to be a lot of input from immigrants, nor do they seem to play a big role in the advisory committee.
- The response in this section did not thoroughly address all the points noted in the prompts.
- The applicant states there are no models when, in fact, there are a lot of models.
- Did not see evidence that immigrants were consulted or how they would be incorporated into the advisory board.
- Focus is on recruitment of immigrants and very little said about retention. There were no references to the integrative services needed to ensure immigrants can make it in the community. Integrative services are the largest need.
- Partnerships are really good but seemed like they missed a critical piece of their homework. They need to include immigrant voices from the start. If they were included, it is not in the application.

Expertise and Training

- The proposal cites KVCOG's 55 years of providing planning services to 60 municipalities in the Kennebec Valley. Recent planning efforts include work during the pandemic and disaster planning.
- Contrary to their statement, there are lots of models out there for integrating immigrants into a community. There is no evidence that they have done much research about it.

- Grasp of the issue not as deep as it needs to be. Does not discuss developing cultural competence.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- The applicant clearly and succinctly describes the organization's staffing, experiences, and structure. The applicant answered all questions in their entirety.
- The planning team includes a variety of experts on municipal planning, creating advisory groups, facilitation of meetings, and the creation of policies, handbooks, and procedures. The Planning Lead has a professional background in Social Work, Research, Quality Improvement, and Systems Change.
- The applicant has the organizational capacity to manage an AmeriCorps program, but the proposal appears to lack an understanding of what is really needed to address the problem they've outlined.
- Likely to be able to plan the program with more input related to the issue than they have had to date or is evident from the narrative. Diversity in hiring is a far different issue than supporting immigrants in the community.

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 %)

- Items were clear and details were provided. All required sections were complete.
- There are formula errors and other issues.
- There is nothing that jumped out that suggests underfunding -- it appears solid.
- Asking for more than \$60,000

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 seems to have clear goals and motivations behind the desire to receive the grant. It appears they have laid the proper foundation needed to be prepared for the assistance of this grant.
- The proposed work is aligned with the work KVCOG has accomplished over the course of the past 55 years. Further, its partners (including United Way) also have demonstrated expertise in leading this level of effort.
- Another maybe. They don't seem to understand that there needs to be a focus on retention as well as recruitment. If they are planning on providing integrative services, they don't mention it. If another organization/partner is planning on providing integrative service, they don't mention it. Without these services their recruitment is not likely to be fruitful.
- Somehow they need to establish, or be working with, a welcome center that provides assistance in accessing integrative services.
- Need to think long and hard about rural areas – how far away from services they will be having immigrants move. Transportation, drivers license, etc. are huge issues. It's more than opportunity for employment.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- None.
- How, besides job training, they will be working with immigrants that they recruit. How they actually plan to recruit.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

Embracing immigrants is a great idea. They should talk to some to find out what new Mainers really need when they move to a community. The diversity training that they are planning is wonderful, as is workforce development, but it takes more than that.

Task Force Review Notes:

Proposal Alignment and Model.

- Tangentially, this proposal would alleviate affordable and safe housing needs for immigrants moving to the project area. The proposal is for an area designated a rural. The employment rate in the three-county area dropped from 97% in 2019 to 94.7% in 2020. The Labor Force percentage is consistently three points below state averages. Counties in the Kennebec Valley region are 97-99% white (compared to 72% nationally), lacking culturally relevant infrastructure and networks as well as a sense of inclusivity. It is unclear from the application how the unemployment rates compare to national averages. While AmeriCorps programs are currently in Somerset County (Maine Street Skowhegan), Waldo County (Maine Youth Alliance), and Kennebec (KVCAP), this proposal will work with many more municipalities throughout the three-county region. The proposal is aligned with and will fit into KVCOG's transition from transactional relationship with municipalities to a regional capacity and growth model. It includes key partners and KVCOG has strong relationships with the 60 communities. It is unclear how KVCOG is connected to or informed by immigrant communities who will be one of the key beneficiaries. This will be essential for helping communities develop cultural competence. Financial and leadership stability of KVCOG and its partners will facilitate a successful project. Partners appear to have clear roles and responsibilities.
- The grant focuses on increasing diversity and planning to create more supportive communities for diversity to thrive.

Preferences from RFP

- The partners who have worked together for the foundation of this proposal include the Kennebec Regional Diversity Coalition, the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce, KVCAP, and the United Way of Kennebec Valley. The work during the planning year can be strengthened by adding more immigrant voices and influence. Waldo and Somerset Counties meet the USDA rural definition. Therefore, two of the three counties meet the criteria. The applicants and partners serve this area. Waldo County CAP is not included and could benefit planning for that county. While the proposal includes partners who serve marginalized populations, leadership is not representative.
- It serves rural communities, increases diversity of communities, and aims to serve marginalized communities.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- The applicant has the organizational and financial capacity to manage a planning process and an AmeriCorps program. The budget is aligned with the program narrative and has capacity to support the planning process. The budget requests \$1,674 above the allowed CNCS share. That amount needs to be shifted to Grantee Share.
- Federal request exceeds funding limit of \$60,000

Fiscal Systems

- The applicant submitted evidence of standard financial management practices and of financial stability. The audit is performed every two years. They recently participated in the complex, grant-funded Cares Act Resiliency to provide financial support to area businesses and to build regional capacity.
- The applicant meets all standards.

Grant Readiness