

Planning Grant Proposal Report to Commission from Task Force

Recommendation: Forward or fund with corrections/modifications

Legal Applicant: Unity College: Sky Lodge

Application ID: 22AC249355

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

Commission Priorities: Public Health, 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	\$65,310*		\$13,010
Member Support			
Indirect (Admin)			
CNCS Award amount		Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	
% sharing proposed	83.39%		16.61%
% share required	0%		
Cost-per-member proposed	n/a		

Program Description (executive summary):

Unity College Sky Lodge proposes to develop an AmeriCorps program to serve 11 rural Maine communities in the Moose River Valley Jackman region of Somerset County. It will address workforce development and public health access that impacts the lives of the rural residents in the AmeriCorps focus areas of economic opportunity, education, and healthy futures. The AmeriCorps Federal ARP investment of \$60,000 will support planning activities carried out in collaboration with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Hills Consolidated School SAD12, the Jackman Region Community Health Advisory Team (CHAT), Somerset Public Health, and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). 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) US Department of Agriculture (USDA); (2) Forest Hills Consolidated School SAD12; (3) Jackman Region Community Health Advisory Team (CHAT); (4) Somerset Public Health; and (5) Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

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	Adequate	11.25
Readiness for Planning	Adequate	11.25
Expertise and Training	Strong	5
Organizational Capability		
Organizational Background & Staffing	Adequate	18.75
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Weak	12.5
Total Peer Reviewer Score		70.00

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	11.3
• Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)	Adequate	2.8
• Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse	Adequate	2.8
• 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	Weak	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	Weak	7.5
Fiscal Systems		
• capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements	Adequate	3.75
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial management practices	Weak	2.5

• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial status/stability	Weak	2.5
Grant Readiness	Adequate	11.25
Total Task Force Score		70.0
Peer Review Score		70.0
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)		140.0

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)

- The proposal quantifies the need in the region using data from the school district (SAD12):
 - 28% of the school population is economically disadvantaged;
 - Only 37% of the total student population scored at or above their grade level in math;
 - Only 47% of the school population scored at or above their grade level in reading.
- Rural. Geographic area well defined. Collaboration with existing partners. Need could be more strongly presented.

Response to Need

- Given what Unity College articulated as the need in Somerset County, their focus on cultural competence, technological literacy, and career-specific skills appears to be appropriate.
- Good description of partnerships & programs. Rational provided for us of AmeriCorps volunteers. Task description very general Description of intended program very general

Readiness for Planning

- Unity College's vision of engaging, educating, and creating a sustainable world appears aligned with this endeavor.
- Lead staff well qualified. Stakeholder engagement plan provided. State that hey have used volunteers, but description not specific. Connection between missions is good.

Expertise and Training

- While the proposal transparently cites the college's unfamiliarity with managing AmeriCorps grants, the staff who will leading the college's planning team has a strong background in sustainability. Further, the organization has experience in identifying, tracking, and interpreting research evidence and its impact on the community.
- They have the organizational structure to manage the grant. State they will need help w/Theory of Change and Logic Model.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- Very strong descriptions of staff experience and background. Does not clearly describe the organization's opportunities and challenges.
- This project appears to be appropriately staffed by United College's Vice President of Sustainable Ventures, the Director of Sky Lodge, and two full-time guest experience coordinators.
- Very good organizational capacity.

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 %)

- The budget is submitted with mathematical errors.
- Unity College budgets that it will contribute \$13,010 towards this planning effort.
- Face sheet says \$65,310 (\$5,310 over allowed) but narrative says \$60,000.
- The personnel fringe is not reasonable – it is 100% of salaries.

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:

- Unity College received \$363,310 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for distance learning. This grant serves as an imprimatur but also has established a platform upon which Unity College can build upon for this specific AmeriCorps effort.
- They have very good organizational capacity and are very good at delivering training/educational programming, which is what they are proposing to do.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- The first four sections of the proposal were extremely strong, and clear, and demonstrated the organization's readiness to make the most out of this planning grant. The section on "Organizational Capability" was significantly weaker, and I battled with "adequate" or possibly lower.
- Exactly what the AmeriCorps members would do.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

[no comments submitted]

Task Force Review Notes:

Proposal Alignment and Model.

- The 11-town Moose River Valley Jackman region of Somerset County identified in the proposal includes rural communities such as Jackman and meets rural criteria. The applicant indicates it will address public health and workforce development, including cultural competence, technological literacy, and career-specific skills. More clarification with details is needed to confirm this. This proposal dovetails with implementation of a \$363,310 USDA distance learning and telemedicine grant that supports virtual classroom learning (platform to be constructed in 2023), digital and cultural competence, remote collaboration, and healthy lifestyles. AmeriCorps members will provide programming. How will this programming be sustained after AmeriCorps involvement concludes? Unity College has experience and infrastructure to support volunteerism. It appears the external stakeholders' coalition will be developed, using the local partners. Sky Lodge was volunteer run prior to COVID shutdowns.

Preferences from RFP

- They indicate they are partnering with USDA. I'm uncertain if this refers to a funding partnership or to working with staff from USDA Rural Development offices, USDA service centers or other Maine USDA presences. Other partners include Forest Hills Consolidated School SAD 12, Jackman Region Community Health Advisory Team (CHAT), Somerset Public Health, and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (ILLI). Due to COVID, they are revitalizing their partnership relationships. The West River Valley Center was a community center for older people but has been acquired by Unity College. The Sky Lodge now focuses on lifelong learning for local residents.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- The request for CNCS Share is \$5,310 over the allowable amount for the grant request. The budget reflects a 100% Personnel Fringe Benefit rate, with \$11,300 of that provided by the applicant. The narrative indicates "30% of salary allocated." However, 30% of \$33,900 is not \$22,600. Staff travel seems low unless most interactions will be virtual. The budget is weak.

Fiscal Systems

- They served as a sub-PI for NIH grant that was complex. The audit made recommendations which the management indicates it is implementing.