

Grant Proposal Report to Commission from Task Force

Recommendation: Forward or fund only if corrections/modifications are negotiated

Legal Applicant: Greater Portland Council of Governments

Program Name: [repeated legal app name]

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

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area: Disaster Services, Environmental Stewardship

Local Share Required: Yes No

Applicant type: New (no prior AC experience)

Proposed Dates: 10/01/2023 to 09/30/2024

Re-compete (# of yrs: 3)

Submitted request is for Yr 1

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

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	NA		NA
Member Support	NA		NA
Indirect (Admin)	NA		NA
CNCS Award amount	\$276,000	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	<i>[\$220,142 shown as other funds to be used by program.]</i>
% sharing proposed	100%		0%
% share required	100%		0%
Cost-per-member proposed	\$23,000		
max allowed	\$23,000		

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 12 MSY

	Slot Types Requested						
	1700	1200	900	675	450	300	Total
Slots With living allowance	12						12
Slots with only ed award							

Program Description (executive summary):

The Greater Portland Council of Governments will have 12 AmeriCorps members who will enable increased capacity and impact of municipalities and agencies throughout Cumberland and York Counties, Maine via systems development, project implementation, data collection, planning, outreach and community engagement. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps Members will be responsible for increased municipal and regional capacity for community and environmental resilience, with specific focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation. AmeriCorps Members will also support environmental stewardship by providing education, outreach, and training to residents in Cumberland and York Counties on climate impacts and vulnerabilities, solutions, and environmentally conscious practices and increasing volunteer recruitment and retention within municipalities and agencies where applicable. The AmeriCorps investment of \$276,000 will be matched with \$220,142, \$193,592 in public funding and \$17,950 in private funding.

Service locations:

Not named in proposal

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

Municipal Governments of Cumberland and York, The Roux Institute at Northeastern University, MMA, (agencies and Non-profits remain un-named)

Will the applicant place AmeriCorps members with other agencies? Yes No

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

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

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

1 OUTPUT: G3-3.4 # of organizations that received capacity building services

Proposed target: 8

1 OUTCOME: G3-3.10A # of organizations that increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and/or program reach

Proposed target: 6

2 OUTPUT: EN3 # of individuals receiving education or training in environmental stewardship

Proposed target: 70

1 OUTCOME: EN3.1 Number of individuals with increased knowledge of environmental stewardship

Proposed target: 45

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

(measures listed in the RFP not entered and targets were not proposed because CNCS does not allow them)
To be entered in state award if selected nationally for funding.

CAPACITY BUILDING

(measures listed in the RFP not entered and targets were not proposed because CNCS does not allow them)
To be entered in state award if selected nationally for funding.

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		
Theory of Change & Logic Model	Adequate	18
Evidence tier – category points	Pre-preliminary	3
Evidence quality	Strong	7
Notice Priority	Adequate	0.75
Member Experience	Strong	6
Organizational Capability		
Organizational Background & Staffing	Strong	13
Compliance/Accountability	Strong	8
Member Supervision	Strong	4
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Strong	25
Evaluation Plan	NA	
Executive Summary conforms with template	Yes	
Total Peer Reviewer Score	84.75	

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
Program Alignment and Model		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> degree to which the community need targeted by the proposal is aligned with one of the funding priorities stated in the RFA 	Adequate	9.38
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> extent to which the applicant proposes to serve communities described in 2522.450(c). 	Substandard	3.13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proposal adds to the AmeriCorps grant portfolio goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse 	Adequate	2.81
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal could be innovative use of AmeriCorps and might be replicated 	Weak	1.88
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence the program can be sustained beyond initial start up 	Adequate	2.81
Commission RFA Preferences		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal is from a partnership or coalition 	Weak	7.5
Past Performance		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can comply with requirements, info consistent with other grant administrator's info, consistent with externally verified past performance 	Adequate	1.875
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMPETE ONLY: applicant used member positions 	Weak	1.25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMPETE ONLY: used financial resources allocated 	Weak	1.25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMPETE ONLY: implemented program effectively 	Weak	1.25
Financial Plan	Adequate	735
Fiscal Systems		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements 	Strong	5.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of orgz financial mgt practices as evidenced by audits, etc. 	Strong	5.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of sponsor orgs financial status/stability per audit, 990, etc. 	Strong	5.0
Grant Readiness		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicant’s systems, policies, experience, partnerships, leadership support, financial and personnel resources, etc. are fully prepared to implement the program 	Adequate	11.25
Total Task Force Score		66.875
Peer Review Score		84.75
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)		151.625

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward or fund with no corrections/modifications
- Forward or fund only if corrections/modifications are negotiated
- 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.

- The need must be clearly stated and explicitly supported by data. The first bullet under “Theory of Change” was not addressed. (“The problem is prevalent and severe in communities where the program plans to serve and has been documented with relevant data.”)
- The direction to discuss the need as it relates to the US CDC Social Vulnerability Index must be followed.
- Towns to be served and partners need to be identified. The program currently operating has drifted away from original proposal. Need to be clear who will host and why if members of GPCOG are not going to benefit.
- Logic model direction to summarize how the role current or historical inequities faced by the underserved communities contribute to the problem must be addressed.
- The program name must be corrected.
- Better recruitment plan should be evident since the program has had such poor performance after the first year.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design. *This section covers the community need, service to be performed in response to need, evidence the service will be effective, roles for AmeriCorps and partners, performance measures, and anticipated results for year one.*

Theory of change and logic model

- Because the performance measures don’t match the required performance measures on page 32 of the RFA, could not give this section a strong rating. However the rest of the narrative and members efforts to educate the community and recruit volunteers from the community are essential in helping meet the objective of Maine Won’t Wait.
- The Theory of change is based off Building Capacity and addressing Climate Issues. The change is being based on State climate action plan (Maine Won’t Wait) and addresses needs within the communities being served. I did not specifically see Theory of change heading but did find the narrative under Rational and Approach/Program Design. Climate change issues have been identified and noted as problems for communities but resources are not available to map out future strategies to lessen the impact. The program would build capacity with local resources and training to improve future outcomes. The logic Model was short, Questions on measurable outcomes were not adequately answered and missing some components.

Evidence Tier

- The applicant has not submitted any outcome evaluation reports, which is required to be considered at the preliminary evidence tier. Also, this program while already existing (in its third year), is still evidence informed only.

- The Evidence base submission is pre-preliminary and was based on the past 2years of a successful similar program run by the GPCOC. The program aligns with the State’s November 2020 report, Strengthening Maine’s Clean Energy Economy and Maine Climate Council four year plan for climate action ‘Maine Won’t Wait’ – under this program Section H outlined the need for engagement of Maine people and communities in climate change impacts and opportunities. This would be a new program without specific studies. An evidence-informed program uses the best available knowledge, research, and evaluation to guide program design and implementation, but does not have scientific research or rigorous evaluation of the intervention described.

Evidence Quality

- "GPCOG has had 24 AmeriCorps members successfully complete their terms of service thus far. Out of first two cohorts of members, 79% have remained in the region and found employment, and 54% received job offers from their host sites or contacts made with GPCOG partners during their terms of service."
- The evidence being used is within two year and based on a similar program design. That prior program was noted as being successful using these methods. The need being cited comes from two reports both completed in 2020. The Evidence base submission is pre-preliminary and was based on the past 2years of a successful similar program run by the GPCOC. The program aligns with the State’s November 2020 report, Strengthening Maine’s Clean Energy Economy and Maine Climate Council four year plan for climate action ‘Maine Won’t Wait’ – under this program Section H outlined the need for engagement of Maine people and communities in climate change impacts and opportunities.

Notice Priority

- The applicant clearly identifies member experience and environmental stewardship as two funding priorities that are targeted for change through their program. I also believe that they are addressing the workforce pathways/development priority as well.
- The program fits in the Federal Priority of Environmental Stewardship and the commission’s priority of capacity building. On the edge of strong but needs a more compelling discussion under this heading.

Member Experience

- The applicant clearly meets all of the assessment criteria below. I especially like the fact that their program has had success already with the demographic diversity of their AC members.
- Member experience has been detailed out in the narrative and throughout the application. Diversity has been addressed as well as opportunities and training members will receive. The members will have community and non-Profits engagement and will have to learn to work/juggle multiple priorities. The member experience as written was a strong aspect of the application.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- the applicant clearly meets all of the assessment criteria below. One of the most important assets the applicant has is detailed in the application: “GPCOG's full-time Resilience Program Manager, Julia Breul, who comes to the agency with years of experience recruiting, hiring, onboarding, supporting, and managing teams. She also has experience designing and executing multiday trainings for enthusiastic environmental educators and ensuring their success in the field.”
- The application clearly describes the roles, responsibilities and structure of the staff. The AmeriCorps Resilience Program is managed by GPCOG's full-time Resilience Program Manager, Julia Breul, who comes to the agency with years of experience recruiting, hiring, onboarding, supporting, and managing teams. She also has experience designing and executing multiday trainings for enthusiastic environmental educators and ensuring their success in the field. The Program Manager is closely supported by Tony Plante, GPCOG's Chief Operating Officer and Director of Municipal Collaboration who brings over 35 years in local government and currently oversees all internal operations at GPCOG and manages HR. The program is also supported by a Finance Director, Josh Kochis, who oversees the agency's financial accounting and reporting. Josh brings extensive knowledge of governmental and financial accounting and reporting standards.

Together, this team implements, provides oversight, and monitors the program. The organization has a Diversity and equality policy in place and partnered with Roux Institute at Northeastern University As well as programs through the MMA online university.

Compliance and Accountability

- I believe the applicant meets all of the criteria below except for the 3rd bullet regarding reporting any suspected criminal activity, etc.
- The organization has accountability and monitoring set up within the organization as stated in the narrative under this category: GPCOG has extensive financial systems, policies, practices, and procedures in place to ensure proper use of grant funds. All new funding is added to the organization's accounting software as a separate project to track all expenses and revenues separately. Proper segregation of duties exists for all financial transactions. The annual audit is conducted by an independent third party. Additionally, financial reports for all projects are issued to the entire staff biweekly, and formally reviewed by a senior leadership team on a monthly basis, and the organization's financial statements are reviewed by the organization's Executive Committee quarterly. The organization has familiarity with federal grant compliance and requirements as well as state requirements.

Member Supervision

- I believe the applicant has demonstrated strong member supervision practices that will ensure accountability and success.
- The narrative under this category could have been more specific but all of the elements were there some were better discussed in other elements of the application; Such as types of training members would receive and how they would receive it as well as information on the program leadership. But overall a strong portion of the narrative.

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

The budget attachment was OK and had the required elements plus noted where the outside funding would come from.

Evaluation Plan Feedback

- NA

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

Comments:

- Believe this applicant would be effective in this category of grant. First, they have already completed two full years under their first state formula grant, and have demonstrated some successful outcomes already, particularly with regard to the experience of the AC members who have served thus far. It seems to me that it will take time and it is hard to measure quantifiably improvements in resiliency within participating communities. But I believe the applicant's engagement with those communities is appropriate and if continued, will have positive outcomes that address the AC priorities that this program is targeting.
- The applicant (GPCOG) has been successful in a previous grant and has the systems set up to implement another similar type of program. The structure is already in place and the community is accepting and ready for the support.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- One of the key components for the success of this program is the recruitment of volunteers within each community by the AmeriCorps Members. While the applicant has detailed the target of recruiting 75 volunteers, they have not shared any data about the number of volunteers successfully recruiting over the

first two years of the program's existence. Also, it is not clear if 75 is the goal for all Members combined across York and Cumberland counties, or per member.

- I was unclear about how success would be measured and tracked. What were the exact metrics that would show not just what elements of the program had success but to what degree and thereby how to improve future tweaks

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- would have liked to see more around the Budget breakdown. Overall a very good proposal.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

PROPOSAL ALIGNMENT AND PROGRAM MODEL

- No clear evidence as to how this project will be sustained over time. Some missing elements of information like actual service locations which makes it difficult to assess buy in from these partners. Plan to engage and train to increase diversity and inclusion in Cumberland and York Counties. Application reference a lot of training around various topical areas but lack information on who/how re: training. Are these evidence-based programs, subject matter experts, etc.
- The program directly aligns with the priority area of environmental stewardship and touches on enhanced member experience and workforce pathways. Rated as adequate as it's borderline.
- The program mentions but does not specifically guarantee that it will benefit distressed communities. Since the actual participating communities are not identified, there is no guarantee that any such community will be included.
- Re: grant portfolio, the Commission has traditionally funded numerous programs in the southern part of the state. As we have worked to diversify our geographical spread, this has declined. As a result, maintaining this program in southern Maine now rates as adequate in terms of balancing our portfolio. While the program itself is not particularly innovative, it could be use as a model approach to addressing community resiliency and climate change issues elsewhere in Maine as noted in the climate corps proposal.
- Sustainability of the program. It clearly aligns with the mission and interests of GPCOG, which is financially strong and stable, and has strong partnerships with a large pool of communities, which supports the notion that some of these communities are likely to sustain their efforts, perhaps through adding to their own staff capabilities. Community engagement is called for in the development and implementation of the individual community-based projects, as is volunteer recruitment. While GPCOG has now developed some experience in volunteer management, the extent of experience in this area of the various community partners is not known.

RFA PREFERENCE(S)

No comments

PAST PERFORMANCE

- Applicant has history and previous experience, strong leadership/member experience in place.
- The material submitted clearly indicates the organization has the capabilities to manage this grant and meet all compliance requirements. It has significant experience in handling grants and grant requirements, although the grant they selected to highlight is not terribly comparable to a more focused programmatic grant such as this AC program. There isn't any indication that the funding agency's grant manager had commented on performance and compliance.
- Note that the applicant itself has limited experience in volunteer management outside of the current AC program it operates. Since the volunteers proposed to be recruited in this grant will be with placement agencies, their adequacy cannot be judged since they are not known. The program does plan to do some training for the AC members on volunteer recruitment/management, but not much detail is provided.
- Given that GPCOG is a current grantee, it is worth noting that its compliance during the first year of the program was generally good; however, during the second year, reporting problems were frequent. In

addition, recruitment fell off and problems seem to be continuing in this area for the third grant year. So, a mixed bag showing that the organization has the capability but for some reason has run into problems recently with reporting compliance.

FINANCIAL PLAN

- This is a fixed amount grant and the budget looked ok. The source of local funding is described and a significant amount appears to be committed. However, the portion to come from placement agencies is not yet confirmed.

FISCAL SYSTEMS

- History and systems in place managing federal dollars.
- GPCOG is financially strong with appropriate practices and systems in place.

GRANT READINESS

- Strong leadership in place and experience. Question broader reach in terms of partnerships, non-profits for example, none listed. Applicant did not provide information on specific service locations in the community.