

Grant Selection Process Report to Full Commission

Legal Applicant: Main Street Skowhegan **Program name:** Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps

Recommendation: _____

Reviewers: **TF:** Meinders, Proulx-Curry, Barrett **Peer:** Hennessey, Hartt, Shapiro

Grant Category: Formula Competitive
 Other Competition **Performance Period:** Year 1 Year 2 Year 3
 Cost Reimbursement

Grant Type: Planning **Start/End Date:** 01/01/2022 to 12/31/2024
 Fixed Price Ed Award Only

Applicant Type: Recompete New

ME Priority Area: Public Health **Fed Priority Area(s):** [n/a]

Request for New Resources

		CNCS	Local
New CNCS Funds: <u>\$81,500</u>	Cost sharing proposed	%	%
Match Committed: <u>\$n/a</u>	Min. Match required	%	
Total Grant Budget: <u>\$</u>			
Cost Per Member: <u>\$16,300</u>			

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

Total prior years with CNCS funding: [3]

Prior experience with CNCS funding: The applicant will complete its first Rural AmeriCorps grant on 12/31/2021. Like all Rural AmeriCorps grants, the chief goal was building capacity to deliver services and learn to operate an AmeriCorps program. This grantee is applying for a second Rural grant under the new policy that allows for 2 opportunities in this category.

Statement of Need (from application narrative):

Health statistics for Somerset County, Maine are staggering. According to the most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, Somerset ranked 15th out of 16 counties in health outcomes and dead last for quality of life. Obesity rates have been rising among all age groups in Somerset County. More than a third (36.5%) of adults, nearly a fifth (18%) of high school students, and almost a quarter (22.7%) of middle schoolers are obese, significantly higher than state averages (29.9% of adults, 15% of high school students, and 15.3% of middle schoolers). Nearly a quarter (23%) of Somerset County adults lead a sedentary lifestyle, with no leisure-time physical activity in the past month, higher than the state average of 20.6%. Less than half (47.6%) of adults met aerobic physical activity recommendations (state average is 53.9%). The statistics are even more dire for children: less than a quarter (22.7%) of high school students met physical activity recommendations, and less than a third (28.5%) of middle schoolers met the recommendations, both just slightly above state averages.

AmeriCorps Members will play a critical role in improving the physical and mental health and wellness of residents of Skowhegan and Somerset County-- by the implementation of the Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program, a physical activity and outdoor recreation program designed to get community members outside, active, and engaged with nature. Through the execution of outdoor recreation programming, community gear library management, and volunteer management, members increase the capacity of and provide strategic support to nonprofit organization Main Street Skowhegan (MSS), and partner nonprofit organizations, Lake George Regional Park (LGRP), Somerset Woods Trustees (SWT), R.E.A.C.H. After School Program, and others. They'll serve at the direction of their supervisor and alongside

community partners to recruit volunteers, build local capacity to coordinate and sustain this program, and cultivate the growth of a love of a healthy, active lifestyle and respect for the outdoors in Skowhegan and neighboring communities.

Program Summary (from application):

Main Street Skowhegan proposes to have five AmeriCorps members who will coordinate and execute no-cost outdoor recreation programming designed to increase physical activity and engagement with nature for local community members in Skowhegan, Maine. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps program will have increased participation rates in outdoor recreation programming by 8.8 percent (725 individuals). In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 30 volunteers who will be engaged in and lead community outdoor recreation programming. This program will concentrate on the Healthy Futures Focus Area. The AmeriCorps investment of \$81,500 will be matched with \$34,000; \$0 in public funding and \$34,000 in private funding.

Identified partners:

- Lake George Regional Park,
- Somerset Woods Trustees,
- R.E. A.C. H. After School Programs

Host sites (if applicable): N/A

SCORING DETAIL

I. Summary of Peer Reviewer Consensus Scores

CATEGORY	Rating	Points
Program Design Section (50%)		
Need	Adequate	3.75
Intervention	Adequate	6
Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model	Adequate	12
Notice Priority	Adequate	0.75
Member Training	Strong	6
Member Supervision	Weak	3
Member Experience	Adequate	3.75
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification	Weak	1.5
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Adequate	9
Compliance and Accountability	Adequate	9.75
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Strong	25
Total		80.5
Final Recommendation to Task Force: Recommend for Further Review		

II. Summary of Task Force Consensus Rating and Final Score:

Category	Rating	Points
Program Alignment & Model		
Degree to which the community need targeted by the proposal is aligned with one of the funding priorities stated in the RFP	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
Communities to be served fall withing one of the non-metro RUCC codes	Strong	5
Past Performance		
Can comply with requirements, info consistent with other grant administrator's info, consistent with externally verified past performance	Strong	3.75
RECOMPETE ONLY: applicant used member positions	Strong	3.75
RECOMPETE ONLY: used financial resources allocated	Strong	3.75
RECOMPETE ONLY: implemented program effectively	Strong	3.75
Financial Plan	Strong	15
Fiscal Systems		
Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements	Adequate	6.25
Strength of orgz financial mgt practices as evidenced by audits, etc.	Adequate	6.25
Strength of sponsor orgs financial status/stability per audit, 990, etc.	Strong	8.34
Grant Readiness		
Program Integration	Strong	5
Proposal Support	Strong	5
Applicant Readiness	Adequate	3.75
Volunteer Management Strength and Experience	Strong	5
GTF Review Total:		87.71 of 100 possible

III. Final Combined Score

Total	168.21 of 200 possible
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Final Assessment of Application:

Fund with no Corrections
 Fund with Corrections
 Do Not Fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections:

1. Clarify if all details on funds, including in-kind, are reflected in Source of Funds. Need to know that all program costs are accounted for and covered.

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED

Section: Program Design (50 %)

Need

- Backed with statistics indicating that increased physical activity might be helpful for local people.
- Defines rural community. Provides statistics about obesity in all age ranges within the county. AmeriCorps will address this through offering a physical activity and outdoor recreation program.
- Skowhegan and Somerset county meet the criteria of rural based on 2019 census data. AmeriCorps members would increase the capacity and provide strategic support for a physical/outdoor recreation program. Evidence for the community is based on a recent Community Health Needs Assessment is strong and include data related to prevalence of obesity, low quality of life, and lack of exercise engagement. Community planning occurred in 2015-2016 with engagement of 500+ citizens who identified a commitment to outdoor recreation as part of the Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation.
- Hit all the points but were not very complete about how they would get community participants. Not sure how or if they could meet their targets.

Intervention

- The programming seems strong, but I am unclear as to how the underserved youth and families in poverty will be recruited to participate.
- At least three events a week, can be from 60 min to full day. Break down of time by percentage. Very clear and easy to understand planned schedule, each day is broken down from 9:00-5:00. Identifies partners who will help with programming. Could go into more detail about who recruiting new volunteers will take place.
- Duration, intensity, and target population are adequately described. Key roles are defined and relevant to the intervention and reported in percentage of time spent in each role. A detailed example of a weekly schedule is provided with daily and hourly tasks. Roles of key partners are not described in this section. The proposed intervention aligns with the community identified need as a focus on outdoor recreation to improve health and quality of life. Community volunteers contribute to programming, supporting other volunteers, and ensuring the sustainability of the program.

Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model

- The most recent study they can find that says the outdoor activity improves health is from 2013?
- 400 participants have been served already, AmeriCorps will grow this and have a minimum 156 program hours a year, this cannot be done without the team. Each year an increase of 7% individuals participating, but how did they come up with this increase. But there are target sets. 5 hours a week will be spent on capacity building, this will lead to 155 new volunteers at the end of three years.
- The quantity of service is described for AmeriCorps members, facilitators, and volunteers. The number of individuals engaging in program is expected to be 725 in year 1 and increase by 7% in each year. Relevant goals (e.g. increased community pride of program participants) are also presented. A description of how AmeriCorps members will support the problem is adequate. The mission of MSS is outlined and encompasses both health of citizens and long-term growth of the Skowhegan economy. The proposal describes briefly how the organization has responded to changing needs. The logic model describes the inputs needed, activities are broken down into duration, frequency and intervention. The target population is not described in the logic model. Goals (outcomes) are quantified and measurable.

Evidence of Effectiveness

- The assumption seems to be if you build it, they will come...but I am not yet convinced.
- Cites the benefits of exercising and outdoor time, two sources. Outdoor recreation is a top priority for the strategic plan of Skowhegan. Ties into building a base for the future "Run of River" plan. Would like more information about the internal capacity for hosting a team.
- Two specific pieces of evidence were presented regarding the outcomes of outdoor activity. The Healthy Living source is not peer-reviewed. However, the second article by the American Public Health Association was highly relevant to the study as it had an emphasis on low-income areas.

Notice Priority

- Assumes increased activity reduces obesity.
- Health Futures is the focus area.
- Funding priority is identified as the Healthy Futures Focus area.

Member Training

- Opportunities for personal and professional growth seem rich.
- Members will complete a two-week training. Training will include outdoor skills, facilitations & community awareness. With a focus on facilitation tactics and risk management. Specialized trainings will be completed by local partners. Members will have the opportunity to become Wilderness First Aid and Red Cross Lifeguard certified. Prohibited activities will be gone over in training and posted at the host site.
- A survey will be conducted by the supervisor at the start of orientation to identify gaps in knowledge so that they may be addressed. Training is focused on learning about the community, group facilitation, and the organization(s). The proposal acknowledges AmeriCorps requirements including prohibited activities. Formal training, provided by a variety of community partners includes white water paddling, ACEs, WFA, lifeguard training, risk management, and the native history of Skowhegan.

Member Supervision

- Prefer actual supervisors already in place.

- The team will be overseen by the Executive Director and will be directly managed by the program manager. The program manager will attend all the required conferences and trainings. Did not go into detail about how the organization will internally prepare.
- Weekly supervision will occur. The program director will train the supervisors. Specific details are lacking in this section.
- Supervisor not named so needed better explanation of how they will prepare internally and better detail on training supervisor.

Member Experience

- Again, the possibility exists for a variety of experiences and growth in a variety of competencies, especially for someone interested in a career in outdoor recreation or recreational leadership.
- Members will gain experience in facilitation, collaboration, teamwork. Will also learn outdoor education and youth engagement. Members can volunteer in the community for meaningful opportunities outside of AmeriCorps. This makes it seem like it would be on their own time, opportunities could be built into the schedule since they will be working 40 hours a week. Members will have the opportunity to connect with other members throughout the state. Each week there will be a debrief for each individual program that will be used to reflect on the program and improve for the next one.
- Transferrable skills are adequately identified. A variety of meaningful service opportunities are available in the local area and adequate for outside service. Built-in reflection or 'debriefing' time is built into the programming time. More formal reflection will take place quarterly. This is an adequate learning experience. Members will be connected to the broader service community in Maine. Recruitment will take place both within the state and nationally.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- The narrative says they have a strong identity but the front page doesn't use "AmeriCorps" in the name of the organization
- Will wear AmeriCorps logo when completing direct service, signage at the office about AmeriCorps, will be introduced as AmeriCorps members. An AmeriCorps banner will be at public events.
- Members will be identified with clothing, signage and table banners. Members will be introduced to community organizations as AmeriCorps members. Member profiles and photos will be posted on the MSS website. The program is called the Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program but that was only mentioned in one place.
- Title of the project on page one (face sheet) did not include AmeriCorps.

Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%

Organizational Background and Staffing

- The Main Street organization and leadership seems to focus on economic development, and the outdoor activity plan seems more geared to enhancing recreationally activity than enlisting people who have health difficulties in outdoor activities.
- The nonprofit exists to help revitalize Skowhegan. Over 100 volunteers, strong ED, marketing assistance and an engaged board of directors. Have utilized AmeriCorps in different programs. The ED will oversee the AmeriCorps program. Have had recent success recruiting new volunteers. Frequently seeks feedback and adjust programs based on suggestions. There will be a full-time program manager 1FTE and the ED will provide .15-.60 FTE depending on the season.
- MMS has a history of working with AmeriCorps members, has an experienced staff and over 100 volunteers. The recreation program has increased capacity in recent years. The organization is experienced in recruiting volunteers. The growth of the organization along with its ties to community partners demonstrates adequate resources for development activities. Information is collected after programs and constructive feedback is discussed and then implemented by the management team. Supervisor qualification criteria is delineated. The above is evidence for adequate organizational background and staffing.

Compliance and Accountability

- They say they have these things but they seem not to be specific about how things are done...
- Has written financial policies with checks and balances. All donations and income are handled by two people. ED compares all documented program expenses.
- The proposal describes adequate current financial policies, checks and balances, documentation, compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulation and capacity to hold themselves accountable.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%

- AmeriCorps member will be focused on providing activities as proposed.
- Fixed Budget.
- The cost per MSY is the maximum, \$16,300. Source of funds are adequate and MSS will cover any remaining costs.
- It is compelling to see a variety of funding sources.

TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:

Program Alignment and Model

- Federal focus is Healthy Futures, and meets Maine priority on Public Health. Strong commitment with Skowhegan community and local park communities
- Give this program credit for addressing a Commission priority in that it focuses on healthy futures by improving the physical and mental health of residents through outdoor recreation, even though this is not specifically related to Covid.
- The program is serving a rural area that has limited AmeriCorps presence historically
- The program's focus on health through outdoor activities is not particularly innovative, although the organizations effort to connect this with community and economic development is an interesting additional element. The program is capable of replication elsewhere.
- The program is well aligned with the organization's overall mission. Maine Street Skowhegan lead an impressive community wide strategic planning effort and has taken on the mission of implementing that plan. One major pillar of that plan is outdoor recreation as an element of community health, sustainability, and development.
- Given how the strategic plan and its elements were developed, there was significant community involvement and the agency has developed strong relationships with others in the area including Lake George Regional Park, Somerset Woods Trustees, REACH after school program, the High School Outing Club, and others.
- While a small agency with limited staff, it's finances are very strong with a very health cash balance and limited liabilities. Existing cash balances along with on-going funding from other organizations and activities appear more than sufficient to sustain the program.
- The executive director has been with the program for some time and indicates anticipating staying in her position. At the same time, she is currently the only staff member with the organization having downsized as a result of the pandemic. The site supervisor is a former AC member who will be leaving with those duties going to the executive director.
- As noted, there was significant community input into developing the strategic plan and this has continued during the implementation phase, including the outdoor recreation effort.
- The organization regularly has 120 or so volunteers in a variety of areas and roles including 16 on-going and 15 episodic volunteers for the outdoor recreation program. The organization has a system to communicate regularly with volunteers and is looking to implement new CRM software to better track. Volunteer coordination is currently done by an AC member and the plan is to split this in the continuation period between the executive director and a new AC member who will devote 50% of time to it.
- Good proposal. Addresses health needs indirectly. Fits in very well with the communities other social/economic development efforts. Some cut back in funding during pandemic - reduction in staff.

Past Performance

- Strong record of engaging local volunteers and meeting performance targets.
- The agency has run a successful program during its initial grant period and has shown strong enrollment and retention.
- Although the program acknowledges that the first year of the program posed compliance and reporting systems, it has improved over time and should have no significant problems meeting the reduced requirements given a fixed amount grant, recognizing that this could be challenged should there be a leadership change.
- Even with the Covid challenges, the program performed well in addressing its performance measures and has seen a significant uptick in program participation once it returned in person programming.
- The program continued to offer services during the pandemic through adapting to creative at-distance techniques.
- Project affected by the pandemic. Organization did a good job of pivoting and saving what it could of the program, adjusting to virtual programming, and using the time to plan for the future.

Financial Plan

- Program will be in a fixed amount grant. Local match was not fully outlined, indicating only \$34,000 in local funds. We should require them to detail the source and amount of other funds necessary to sustain the program. Given the agency's financial status, this should not be a major issue.

Fiscal Systems

- Uses a manual accounting system, but effective and accurate
- As noted above, the financials look good; the agency complied with financial reporting over the first grant period, and the financial review showed no significant issues. The only concern is that the Treasurer is a board volunteer and how finances will be handled should that change.
- Audit report. Small organization that has had to cut back on staff due to loss of revenue due to pandemic. Managed to stay afloat non-the-less.

Grant Readiness

- The interview was solid on all points
- As noted above, the program grew out of a community-wide strategic plan and is an element of its implementation. As such, it is well aligned with other efforts programs and supports not only healthy futures and sustainability but community and economic development based on outdoor recreation.
- A number of partners agencies are involved in the effort and it appears to have good community support
- The agency successfully weathered the pandemic shut down through creative use of at a distance programming and used the time to enhance its marketing and outreach efforts.
- Strong volunteer engagement exists and the agency is implementing improved tracking software.
- The only concern is limited agency staff and potential turnover in the key executive director position or Treasurer. There is a transition plan, but if there is a change, I suspect it will be a challenge to implement.
- Other Comments:
 - RFP response was well organized and clearly and directly addressed required topics
 - Need was well documented
 - Additional AC slots will assist in expanding program from 39 to 52 weeks
 - This has been a successful and well-run program during its first grant cycle and I would anticipate that to continue if refunded.
 - Sources of local match should be detailed
- Organizations strategic plan derived from community's strategic plan. Program is well integrated into the social/economic development efforts of the community. Departing VISTA volunteer who helped manage the program appears to be very well organized.