

Grant Selection Process Report to Full Commission

Legal Applicant: Town of VanBuren **Program name:** AmeriCorps Five to Ninety Five

Recommendation: _____

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

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

Grant Type: Planning **Start/End Date:** 9/1/2021 to 8/31/2024
 Fixed Price Ed Award Only

Applicant Type: Recompete New

ME Priority Area: Public Health **Fed Priority Area(s):**

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

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

Total prior years with CNCS funding: [0]
Prior experience with CNCS funding: None.

Statement of Need (from application narrative):

Recently the Rural Resilience Community Alliance (RRCA) surveyed people in contiguous ZIP codes 04750 and 04785, each coded 10.6 (rural) in the USDA Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code listing, to determine what they believed to be the most pressing needs for area children, families, and elders. The 196 responses set the most critical perceived need to be a safe, supervised outside school time (OST) program for those among the area's 440+ elementary and middle school students with working parents or unsafe home situations. The second most critical perceived need exists among the elderly who must travel a 25-80 mile round trip to meet needs for health care, home maintenance, and financial and welfare services and who are isolated, lacking socialization and meaningful activities. The perceived need is for a center where elders can socialize and helping agencies can assist them on-site. AmeriCorps members will aid RRCA to serve the north-central Aroostook county towns (Limestone, Caswell, Hamlin, Van Buren, and Cyr Plantation). The total population of the area (2017) is 5,107, of whom 1,040 are over 65, and 443 are between 5 and 14 years old. The combined poverty rate is 29.6% as of July 2020 (24.8% in ZIP 04750 and 34.5% in ZIP 04785), more than double Maine's 12.9% rate. We are in the least favorable 2% of Maine ZIPs with respect to Per Capita and Median Household Income. Approximately two-thirds of the elementary and middle school students are eligible for free or reduced school lunch. Food insufficiency is widespread: in the past year, the local food banks' clients have nearly doubled from 2019 and food pantry staff estimate they are serving 30 to 40 percent of our residents.

With respect to area children, the most recent (2018-19) Department of Education public report, "Maine Student Performance on State Assessments" states that the academic performance of students in our three K-8 schools (Limestone, Caswell, and Van Buren) averages approximately 56% "below or well below state expectations" in language arts, 76% in math, and 49% in science. Recreation Department offerings are very limited, and scouting is seen as too expensive for many children.

RRCA was formed as the Van Buren Resiliency Project in 2019 by citizens concerned about the prevalence of the lifelong negative physical and mental health effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) within the community among people of all ages. In 2020 we received an AmeriCorps planning grant and formed a planning team of nine members to examine the challenge of ACEs and feasible and sustainable means of combatting its negative effects through promoting community and individual resilience. The team met twice monthly to consider needs, (in)adequacy of resources, and potential programs to address those needs. Over 50 people helped to plan and write this proposal through membership on the planning committee or by providing valuable information and insights. This proposal reflects the results of their work in a significantly underserved area of the state where no services are currently available to meet these identified critical needs.

Program Summary (from application):

The Rural Resiliency Community Alliance (RRCA) program proposes to have five AmeriCorps members who will assist the RRCA director to (1) form and staff a nine-member advisory council of stakeholders in ZIP Codes 04750 and 04785: at least three will be persons negatively affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They will provide critical local input for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of an integrated program to jointly assist both at-risk children living in poverty and the marginalized and isolated elder citizens of the area. The program goals, based on a 2020 area needs survey conducted by RRCA, are to provide (a) opportunities for healthy individual mental, physical, and social development and (b) meaningful, mutually beneficial intergenerational relationships among children and elders of the community. This council will continue the work of the AmeriCorps-funded RRCA planning team by overseeing the formation of two coordinated programs: a year-round out of school time (OST) program for elementary and middle school children, and an associated drop-in center(s) for elders. Both are programs deemed essential by survey participants. (2) establish and assist in the operation of one or more drop-in centers for elders. The center(s) will (a) serve as locations for County social service agencies to assist elders on-site and reduce the need for out-of-town travel; (b) provide elder-generated activities, classes, and socialization to promote mental and physical health; and (c) link elders to the OST program as volunteers. (3) serve as youth leaders in the OST program and provide training and support to volunteers. (4) assist in providing information and education about ACEs and resiliency for area residents. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps program will have: (1) formed and staffed an active, involved advisory council; (2) established an evidence-based, feasible, and sustainable OST program for 18-30 participants with five trained AmeriCorps members as primary youth leaders; (3) established one self-governing elder drop-in center with four major on-going activities and six members serving as volunteers in the OST program; and (4) managed six community educational forums with at least 25 attendees at each presentation. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional nine community volunteers who will be engaged in tutoring and mentoring in the OST program, and delivering specialized programs and activities in both the OST and the elder programs. This program will concentrate on the focus areas of Education and Healthy Futures. The AmeriCorps investment of \$81,500 will be matched with \$145,119, \$96,939 in public funding and \$ 48,180 in private funding.

Identified partners:

- Elder Governing Council
- Aroostook Area Agency on Aging
- Maine State Department of Education
- TRiO
- APEX
- St Peter Chanel Parish
- Sanctuary Caswell
- Van Buren Ambulance Service
- school administrators

Host sites (if applicable): n/a

SCORING DETAIL

I. Summary of Peer Reviewer Consensus Scores

CATEGORY	Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need	Strong	5
Intervention	Adequate	6
Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model	Strong	16
Notice Priority	Adequate	0.75
Member Training	Weak	3
Member Supervision	Adequate	4.5
Member Experience	Weak	2.5
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification	Adequate	2.25
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	12
Compliance and Accountability	Adequate	9.75
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Adequate	18.75
Total		80.5
Recommended 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	Strong	3.75
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	Strong	3.75
Evidence the program can be sustained beyond initial start up	Adequate	2.81
Communities to be served fall within 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	Adequate	15
RECOMPETE ONLY: applicant used member positions		
RECOMPETE ONLY: used financial resources allocated		
RECOMPETE ONLY: implemented program effectively		
Financial Plan	Strong	15
Fiscal Systems		
Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements	Strong	8.33
Strength of orgz financial mgt practices as evidenced by audits, etc.	Strong	8.33
Strength of sponsor orgs financial status/stability per audit, 990, etc.	Strong	8.34
Grant Readiness		
Program Integration	Strong	5
Proposal Support	Adequate	3.75
Applicant Readiness	Adequate	3.75
Volunteer Management Strength and Experience	Adequate	3.75
GTF Review Total:		90.31 of 100 possible

III. Final Combined Score

Total	170.81 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. Performance Measures - reconsider the ones selected
2. Need better sense of how members time will add up to 1700
3. Locate different funds for \$5000 unspent planning grant funds

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS COMPILED**Section: Program Design (50 %)*****Need***

- Isolated elderly and children living in poverty clearly have needs, and “no services are currently available to meet these identified critical needs.”
- Is a rural community. Rural Resilience Community Alliance survey used to identify most pressing community needs. Need was identified to be safe supervised outside school time and services for elderly. High poverty rates, food insecurity, lower academic performances. Van Buren Resiliency Project came together to plan for the program. Doesn't say how the community will be involved in program implementation.
- The RRCA conducted their own local study with residents depicting the largest perceived needs in the community and selected features of their program based on that. The elderly component of the program was designed based on the rural setting- indicating that seniors needed to travel 25-80 miles for basic services. Strong demographics regarding poverty, citizen age, and food insufficiency supported these statistics. Community input was central in identifying the problem and are planned to be involved with planning, implementation, and evaluation. This section of the application was strong and compelling.

Intervention

- The narrative fills all criteria, and the list of “Key Partners” is extensive with roles well defined.
- Goal is to bring together older and younger generation through out of school activity, establishing a drop in center, and creating multigenerational activities. This is a brand new program so the first two months will be spent training members. 12 month duration, the goal is to have 30 participants by the end of the year. The after school program will go every day from the end of the school day until 5:30. The drop in center will be open for 25 hours per week. Members will spend 60% of their time with the out of school program, 10% with the Elder Governing Team, 10% volunteering training, and 20% doing member development. Many community partners: school district, Aroostook Agency on Aging, Maine After School Alliance and more. Includes daily schedule.
- Intervention duration, intensity, and target population and recruitment were sufficiently described. Key partners were identified along with their associated roles. A detailed daily schedule along with member responsibilities is provided for AmeriCorps members for both the school year and summer. The proposal connects the identified community need with the proposed program and then connects the two components of the program to demonstrate how they are mutually beneficial.

Theory of Change, Evidence of Effectiveness, Logic Model

- The explanation and documentation of the planned program is clear, and documentation recent. AmeriCorps members will have specific roles in program delivery.
- Comments: The goal will be to have the proposed program serving 18-30 children in year one and 25 adults. Will increase incrementally each year based on formative evaluations. Elders program is governed by Elder Governing Team.
- The narrative describes the number of students and elders the program expects to serve in years 1-3. Projected change is realistic and identifies strengths and barriers to growth. AmeriCorps members are identified as integral to the program. The mission of RCCA is described and goals are described adequately. The internal capacity to support AmeriCorps members includes fiscal and programming needs including training, administration, and specialist support including a LCSW and teacher. In addition, planned events for community awareness made the internal capacity portion strong. The logic model adequately sums up the problem, program resources, and outputs for both the OST and elder program along with member development and capacity building. The logic model contained short, mid-term and long-term outcomes that were sequential and reasonable.
- Proposal trying hard to meet two needs that are intergenerational. It is a creative approach to the two issues.
- Evidence was carefully selected.

Evidence of Effectiveness

- U. S. DHHS citation of a “growing body of evidence that Positive Youth Development can prevent a variety of risk behaviors.. is a strong suggestion that this can work.
- Using strength-based approach. Social Emotional Learning and Positive Youth Development. CASEL is the source cited for the use of evidence based practices. Will be replicating the SAFE strategy. Long term and short term benefits to the learning strategy. Members fit into the mission of the organization through preparing trainings on childhood trauma, recruiting participants, and collecting data. The town has a track record of fund and grant management.
- Evidence presented was strong and reflected both the SEL and PYD program components. Evidence for SEL comes from CASEL with an emphasis on peer-reviewed literature and evidence-based programing. The author also cites a meta-analysis with 82 articles to emphasize the long-term gains on a SEL intervention. The evidence for PYD was adequate but determined that more research is needed.

Notice Priority

- Tutoring is a demonstrated means of improving academics, and an after-school program can keep kids safe: there you have education and healthy communities. Engaging older adults in community activities leads to better health as well, as does helping people to understand the effect of trauma can also improve mental health.
- Education and Healthy Futures.
- The funding priority focuses on areas of education and healthy futures. This fits in funding priorities as outlined in the RFP.

Member Training

- The Criteria are all met, with specialized trainings provided.
- 4 -6 week training period. There is a big difference between 4 and 6 weeks, 6 weeks adds in an extra 80 hours of training. Training in tutoring. Earlier in the proposal it is stated this is a new program and training will be a major aspect, does not go into much detail about what this training will include.
- While the specialized training for tutoring is accounted for, this section does not describe how the members will be educated about the community and need (though this is described in the initial narrative).

Member Supervision

- The requirements are met: concerned that members working with the ACE experience may need further support, as hearing about trauma can be traumatic.
- The director will provide supervision. Weekly individual meetings and trainings. Training of supervisors through AmeriCorps and Volunteer Maine Staff.
- The proposal briefly discusses member supervision without any omissions

Member Experience

- The potential professional growth is stated; I am concerned that in an area that has generally isolated, opportunities for social enrichment should be added...other service opportunities are not mentioned.
- Members will obtain Maine Youth Development Certification. Opportunity to attend seminars from local higher education. One reflection day in spring and fall. For a new program more reflection on the process could be needed. Does not go into skills learned through AmeriCorps year that will be used for employment after service.
- This proposal does not describe specific skills that will be transferrable to future employment. There is also an omission of how the members will be connected to the broader National Service Network.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- These members will have the T shirt...programs and offices will have signage. The program has “AmeriCorps” first.
- Will wear AmeriCorps clothing, signage at offices. AmeriCorps is in the project title
- All items were adequately described. AmeriCorps branding will be represented through clothing, signage, and the program title.

Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%

Organizational Background and Staffing

- The interplay between the RRCA and town government will provide accountability and the staffing is headed by experienced professionals.
- Two core staff involved, the volunteer director of RRCA and a certified special education teacher. The proposal was developed by the RRCA Planning Team. Previous volunteer experience involves running a one-week camp experience for children. Self-identified strengths are dedicated volunteers, and community network, challenges are limited staff, opportunities are unused space for development and the room for existing programs to expand into the area. Planning to partner with a local university for data collection and analysis. .8 FTE dedicated by the program director.
- All criteria was responded to. There is an indication of significant staff experience to support the program and the program director is identified. Strengths and challenges are identified and a plan for sharing information is proposed.

Compliance and Accountability

- The town government will have high standards of financial accountability, and a school based program will have lots of scrutiny as well.
- They have strict fiscal control and personnel policies but do not describe them. They are available for viewing at the town office.
- Internal controls are in place to protect against waste, fraud, and abuse of public funds (by the town of Van Buren). The ability to ensure compliance and hold sites accountable if needed is adequately described.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%

- Information seems complete and they have enough funding to support the program
- Fixed budget, numbers align
- Funds are sufficient to support the program and the cost per MSY is \$16,300.

TASK FORCE REVIEWER COMMENT DETAIL:

Program Alignment and Model

- The federal focus is Education & Healthy futures, and indirectly addresses Maine priorities under Public Health
- The program is in a very rural area with little AmeriCorps presence.
- This program is somewhat innovative in several ways. First, it attempts to bring together youth and seniors in a way that meets each group's needs. This is something that is frequently talked about but seems to seldom ever actually happen. Second, it is a deeply grassroots effort in an extremely rural area with limited service availability. If successful, it could serve as a model for other very rural efforts looking to address community sustainability.
- The program is well aligned with the sponsoring organization, recognizing that the town has been deeply involved in the Rural Resilience Community Alliance, the non-profit that is actually the driving force behind this effort. As noted, the Town is supportive and is the legal applicant and fiscal agent; however, it is simply one of the many stakeholders represented in the RRCA.
- The program developed out of a community survey designed to identify the most pressing community needs; as such, it is an effort to implement programs aimed at those needs.
- This is a grassroots effort involving a variety of stakeholders with on-going efforts to encourage other organizations/agencies to become involved.
- The Town of Van Buren is financially sound; however, the RRCA is a much newer organization without a significant track record and will likely be called upon to continue financial support in the future. This may be a challenge. Knowing the degree of Town commitment to financially support the program in future years would be helpful.
- The Town should provide stability in leadership; however, the RRCA is largely dependent upon one highly committed volunteer staff member. While that individual has no plans to leave the organization, it is also clear that the organization has not yet come to grips with the issue of potential transition.
- At the moment, the RRCA is totally volunteer based, with that base largely made up of the board and planning committee. It has not yet developed an organizational approach to managing program volunteers and looks to be anticipating much of this work will be done by an AC member if the grant is awarded.
- Although the RRCA has a very limited track record, there is a strong level of commitment to this project.
- The proposed program appears to have been developed with strong community input and the support of many community organizations. The proposed project provides a systemic solution to a real community need.

Past Performance

- The project is getting started, but the Town Manager has prior experience with other grants (mostly public infrastructure). They worked with AmeriCorps in the planning project.
- Again, the largest challenge here is the lack of a track record for the RRCA. This effort has, however, benefitted from a Planning Grant that has allowed it to advance to a level where it has a reasonable likelihood to succeed, especially with the more simplified requirements of a fixed amount grant.
- It appears to have the local share in line.
- Clarification of the extent to which the Town of Van Buren will be willing/able to provide support should there be a transition in the RRCA director position would be helpful and might be something the RRCA may wish to explore with the town.
- The Town of Van Buren has a good record of managing complex federally funded projects with multiple source of funding.

Financial Plan

- Fiscal management by the town has been strong and the town manager is strongly in support of this project.
- The fixed amount budget and the involvement of the town as the fiscal agent should handle this area.
- Sufficient detail is provided to suggest that the proposed project has been well thought out.

Fiscal Systems

- The financial systems survey response indicated financial reports, accounts are strong and can track federal funds.
- The Town has substantial experience with managing state and federal grants and has a financial system that meets the requirements.
- The Town has a clean audit and is in sound and stable financial condition.
- Audit report and applicants past experience with complex federally funded projects.

Grant Readiness

- The last two questions, I'm torn between adequate and strong rating. This is project is brand new and start up may be challenging, and they lack some experience. But I think they can do it.
- As noted elsewhere, the program grew out of a community based survey that identified the areas of need and was designed to address those area.
- The proposal has strong community-based support but limited staff with the need to develop a plan that will allow the program to continue to operate should the director, for some reason, be unable to continue.
- On a positive note, the Director is highly experienced and strongly committed to the program.
- Other Comments: • If successful, this program would be a great example of what the Commission is attempting with its rural grant program and might serve as an example for other such heavily rural areas with limited established non-profit organizations. • The RFP response was well organized and addressed all of the prompts/required elements. • It's clear that the Planning Grant was essential to the development of this proposal. • Strong statement and documentation of need • Staff report request clarification of a comment on using planning grant funding for training for this grant. • Staff report questions the need for 5 1700-hour positions based on a concern that all AC member time is not fully explained and accounted for. Suggests reducing to 1200 hours or requesting additional information on how their time will be used. • The staff report also suggests adjusting the performance measures and eliminating several -- ED7a and ED5a -- because they are challenging to measure and the data may not be available to the program.
- Clear from interview that the applicant has the experience needed to manage this grant and that the project has been developed with good community input, has strong community support, and provides a system approach to dealing with a community issue.